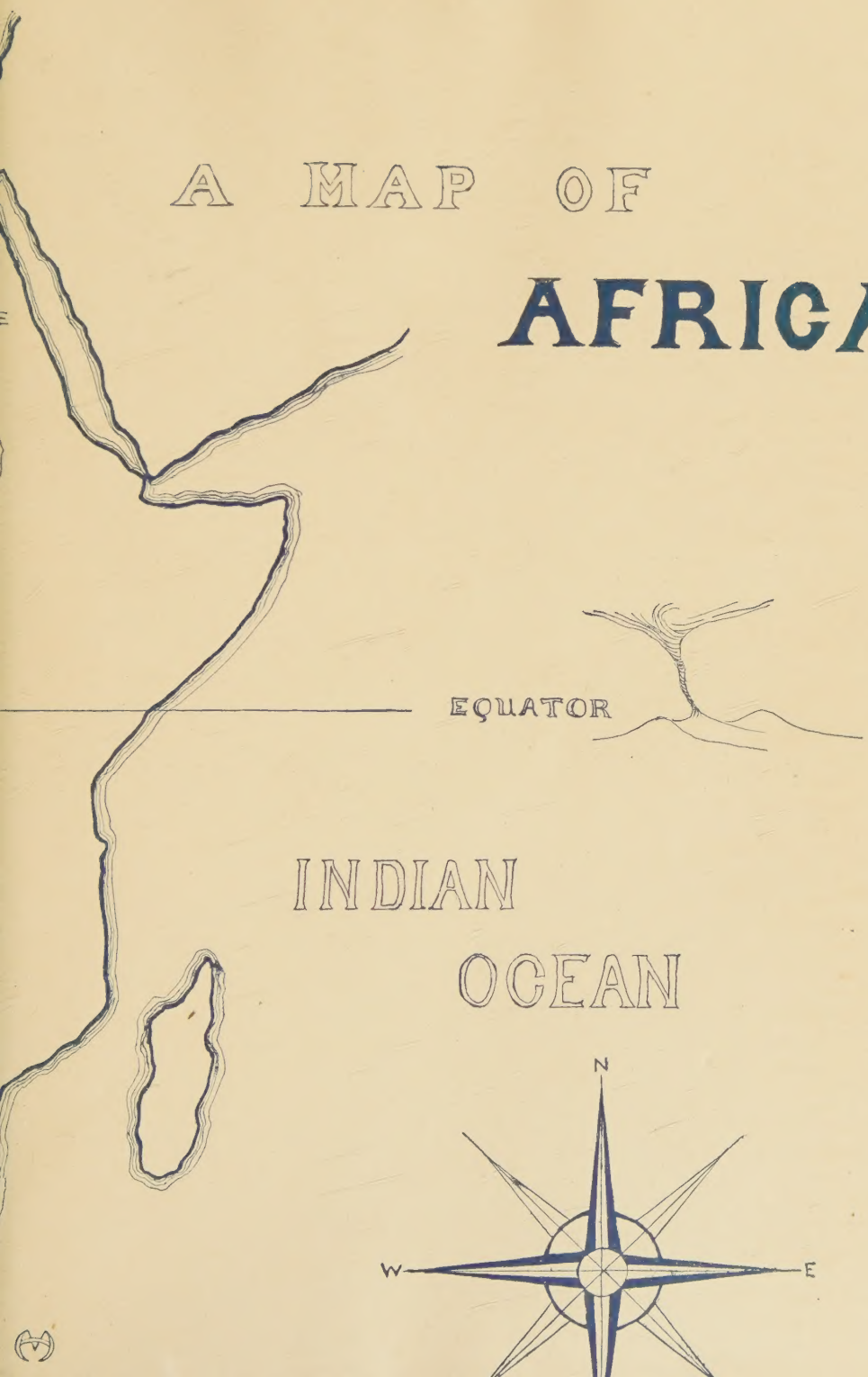
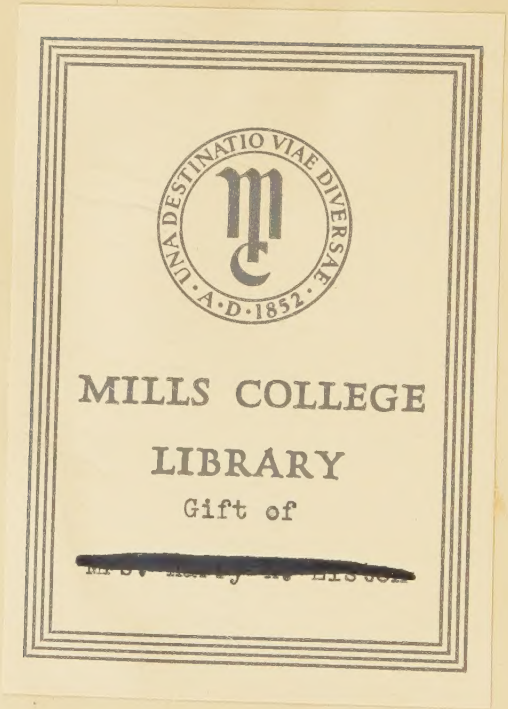
TIMBUCTOO

By LELAND HALL

BECHAR
ATLAS MTS.
Canary Is.
SAHARA
TAOUDENI
Timbuctoo
Lake TCHAD
NIGER RIVER
CONGO RIVER
ATLANTIC OCEAN
KEY
1. Dakar
2. Bamako
3. SEGOU
4. MOPTI
5. KaBara
6. Gao

A MAP OF AFRICA





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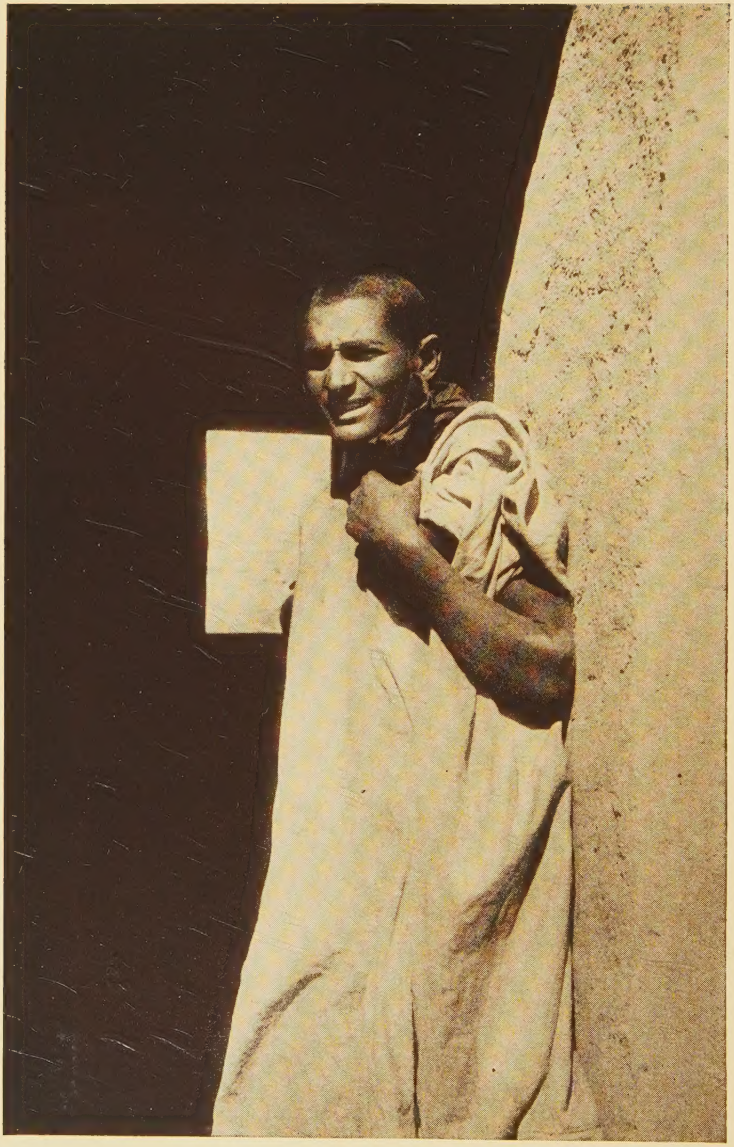

THE SON OF LEHSEN

TIMBUCTOO

By

Leland Hall

With Illustrations from Photographs

NEW YORK *and* LONDON
Harper & Brothers Publishers
1927

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TO

WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON

A GREAT MAN AND

A KIND ONE

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CONTENTS

Chapter		*Page*
	FOREWORD	xi
I.	GOING	1
II.	SETTLING	37
III.	PEOPLE	64
IV.	BABA THE THIEF	95
V.	ALFA'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT	124
VI.	THE SALT CARAVAN	151
VII.	THE SON OF LEHSEN	178
VIII.	THE DEPARTURE	207
IX.	RETURN	230
X.	EPILOGUE	256

ILLUSTRATIONS

THE SON OF LEHSEN	*Frontispiece*	
OMAR	*Facing p.*	12
A BAMBARA COMPOUND	"	24
MY HOUSE IN TIMBUCTOO	"	38
MOULAY, THE WATER CARRIER	"	42
VIEW EAST FROM MY ROOFTOP	"	62
IN THE STREETS	"	78
THE FOUR MOORS	"	90
ALFA IN HIS NEW ROBE	"	142
IBRAHIM	"	166
THE CARAVAN ARRIVES	"	172
UNLOADING CAMELS	"	176
AN ARAB SHRINE	"	202
ABDULLAH	"	216
THE "MAGE"	"	232
HAULING OFF THE "MAGE"	"	232
THE LIGHT-FILLED STREETS OF TIMBUCTOO	"	248

FOREWORD

A journey to Timbuctoo sounds venturesome; yet if in the following account of my experience I have hinted at hazards and dangers, I have in so far falsified the story. To be sure, there is the African sun; there are fevers and other tropical maladies; but a very little precaution is safeguard against them, and taking care of one's self there is such a simple matter that it becomes almost at once a habit. Life in our northern climate, especially in the cities in which most of us live, is beset with far more dangerous risks. Furthermore, dismally as this statement must strike at the imaginative popular belief, wild beasts do not lie in wait for one in Africa.

As for the people native to the land in which I sojourned, they are often reported to be treacherous and fearsome; but it is my belief that there is more human malevolence in Broadway alone than there is in all the Sahara. On the other hand, I may not imply such security in this regard without acknowledging the protection under which I lived.

I confess that when I left my friendly steamer and found myself in Africa I felt bewildered. This was in Dakar, and at the end of the rainy season, when the heat is most oppressive. I was not acclimated; I was untried in many peculiar discomforts. Though I knew

that Timbuctoo was only a week's travel by rail and steamer to the east, I seriously wondered if I had the strength to proceed towards a destination that to my weakened and discouraged spirit seemed dreadfully remote. I went from office to office in Dakar, seeking advice, some reassuring information; but my efforts met everywhere the same smile, the same complete and amused ignorance about Timbuctoo. At last I came to a young Englishman in the warehouse of an English trading company; and though he knew nothing of Timbuctoo, he gave me a letter to a man in Bamako, who could certainly inform me.

"He is an agent of ours, a very able man, Rassim Mademba by name, a black man, you understand."

So I picked up my courage and went on to Bamako, well on the way to Timbuctoo, and presented my letter to Rassim Mademba. It told him no more than my name; indeed, there was no more than that to tell him, nothing whatsoever that could interest him officially. But to him I eventually owed the extraordinary comfort in which I lived in Timbuctoo. He took upon himself the responsibility of engaging my servant, who was not afterwards separated from me during my voyage, and through whom, quarrel as I might with the lad, I could not but feel Monsieur Mademba's influence saving me uneasiness every day. To Rassim Mademba I returned, and shall again return, I hope, to learn from his wisdom.

He gave me a letter of recommendation to a Moroccan

merchant in Timbuctoo, Monsieur Abd-el-Kadir el Barka, who found me a house to live in and lent me furnishings, who entertained me as his guest, and upon the assurance of whose word I might have traveled amicably with his kinsmen across the desert. We do not always treat strangers so.

Mr. Reed, in Bamako, Mr. Martin and Mr. and Mrs. Kurlak, in Timbuctoo, American missionaries all, stood ever ready to help me, though surely they were aware of how widely our views differed.

Thus, for an itinerant *fainéant* like myself, was the way made easy; but what made it safe was the tricolor of France, gay and vivid here and there in that desert land. Naturally I saw something of the French officials, administrators and officers, for I was virtually required to report my movements to them. The tale of their kindness and friendliness towards me would make a book; that of their strength, their fearlessness, their indomitable gaiety, and their understanding, must make in splendid part the history of France in Africa. Not only affectionately but in profound respect I would acknowledge my gratitude to those Frenchmen in Africa under whose vigilance and protection I dwelt there.

TIMBUCTOO

. . . They [the Arabs] fared on along the seashore a whole month, till they came in sight of a high mountain overlooking the sea and full of caves, wherein dwelt a tribe of blacks clad in hides, with burnooses also of hides, and speaking an unknown tongue. When they saw the Arab troops, they were startled like shying steeds and fled into the caverns, whilst their women and children stood at the cave doors looking on the strangers. "O Shayk Abd al-Samad," asked the Emir, "what are these folk?" And he answered, "They are those whom we seek for the Commander of the Faithful." So they dismounted, and setting down their loads, pitched their tents; whereupon, almost before they had done, down came the king of the blacks from the mountain and drew near the camp. Now, he understood the Arabic tongue; so when he came to the Emir he saluted him with the salam, and Musa returned his greeting and entreated him with honor. Then quoth the king of the blacks to the Emir, "Are ye men or Jinn?" "Well, we are men," quoth Musa; "but doubtless ye are Jinn, to judge by your dwelling apart in this mountain, and by your inordinate bulk." "Nay," rejoined the black, "we also are children of Adam, of the lineage of Ham, son of Noah (upon whom be the Peace) and this sea is known as Al Karkar. . . ."

From The Arabian Nights

Chapter I: Going

I

GETTING READY FOR A journey is happy business, what with visions and that sense of importance which invades most of us with the thought that we are going to venture a little. I confess that when I made up my mind to go to Timbuctoo, I felt I was distinguished. Yet it was not at all the high-sounding name of the place which drew me towards it. I wanted to cross the Sahara, but suspected that one way would be enough; and I rather thought it would be easier to come up from the south towards Europe than the other way. Having recently read the life of Père de Foucauld and the life of the famous French Saharian, Laperrine, I knew that Timbuctoo was a city on the southern edge of the desert whence caravans still set out for Algeria and Morocco. One day in the train between Orléans and Bourges I chanced upon a French officer who was leaving in a week for Timbuctoo. So it was, one little thing after another; till at last—I remember well: I was taking a bath and while I was in the tub the idea came to me to go to Timbúctoo.

After the bath, I went in elation to drink an *apéritif,*

and still elated, hired a taxi to go home in. The taxi driver happened to be in a good humor; and finding him contented with my tip, I told him I was going to Timbuctoo.

"C'est loin," he said. "You are free?—free to go where you will? That must be great. Well, *bon voyage!*"

So Timbuctoo became a thing decided, and from that day, early in June, I never doubted that I was going there.

There are many French West African agencies in Paris, and in one of these, whither I went for information, I chanced to be received by a man who had spent several years in Timbuctoo.

"By all means go there," he counseled me enthusiastically. "Plan to arrive in November. The days will be hot, but the nights cool, even cold. It is a healthy climate: no mosquitoes, no dysentery, good water."

And from his desk drawer he brought out photographs he had taken of Timbuctoo; and the time sped so delightfully over these that I had to leave without much instruction. But let me come again, and he would go over every step of the journey with me.

Holidays in England intervened; and when in August I returned to those offices, the man who had received me before was off on his vacation. In his place was another to receive people and answer their questions; and he said:

"Why on earth do you go to Timbuctoo? Of all

dead and God-forsaken places, it is surely the worst. Life is uncomfortable, hopelessly dull. There is nothing, nothing there."

He was bent on discouraging me; so I went out and tried in Paris to find my own way to Timbuctoo. Even in the steamship offices and the tourist agencies, no one really knew where Timbuctoo is. An Englishman thought it in the Himalaya country; a Frenchman thought it in Madagascar. I remember waiting half an hour by a young man at a telephone, who had himself switched from one office to another till he got word for me that one went to Timbuctoo by a Citroën car across the desert, only the car service had been discontinued. Eventually, however, I traced the route: from France by steamer to Dakar, on the west coast of Africa within the curve of Cape Verde; from Dakar by narrow-gauge train—the Sudan Express, which runs once a week—to Bamako, about a thousand miles east; and from Bamako, or rather from Koulikoro a few miles farther downstream, by boat down the Niger four days and nights, to Kabara, the port for Timbuctoo.

In some excitement, I returned to the West African offices. Two men smiled at me, got down tariff schedules, etc., told me what day the train ran from Dakar, how much it cost; prices at the hotel in Bamako—and discomforts,—the fare on the river boat, what the extras were for a bunk, for wine at meals. And they said:

"What are you so excited about going to Timbuctoo for? It's nothing. You seem to think it is in the wilds."

But I forced them to admit there was no hotel there, and they granted I must look well to my equipment, though it began to appear that going to Timbuctoo was really nothing, after all.

Many steamers from France call at Dakar, but those of a certain line are rather better fitted than many of the others. To the offices of that company I went to engage passage for Dakar, only to be practically refused. It was the season when the colonials were returning to their posts after furlough; the boats were full already with men going to the Ivory Coast, Dahomey, the Cameroons, the Congo. "We are not interested," said the clerk, "in passengers going no farther than Dakar."

I protested. The clerk said: "Besides, can you fulfill all these requirements?" and he handed me a printed sheet on which I read that "immigrants" landing in Dakar must be provided with medical certificates, with an excerpt from their *casier judiciaire—i.e.,* from their police record, showing that they had not been in jail for at least six months previous to their landing—and must be ready to deposit the sum of fifteen hundred francs with the immigration officers of the port to pay for their being sent back home in case they came a cropper in the colony. Shades of Ellis Island! It was not for an American to complain.

Luck was with me. In a day or so came a chance to take passage to Dakar on a French tramp steamer out of Dunkerque. My eye happened to fall upon a notice

inconspicuously posted in the agency, saying that Dr. Spire, retired after twenty-five years' medical service in tropical Africa, was ready to examine and advise all men on the point of leaving for the colonies there. This experienced man, brilliant and vigorous, enthusiastic, friendly, after he had found me fit to stand the African climate, prepared the medical kit I should take with me, made a list of the several official details to be put in order, sent me here and there for the latest preventive treatments against typhoid and dysentery, and so fortified me with expert advice, such simple and reasonable advice, that I felt confident to meet whatever unhealthy conditions awaited me in Africa. Moreover, he gave me, before ever I left Paris, a trust in the French doctors on service in the French African colonies, a trust which I may say here was a hundredfold justified in my later experience.

As for my police record, I could not for a while see how I was going to prove I had not been in jail for six months. I think it must have been either my mother's maiden name or the fact that I happened to have change for ten francs in my pocket that won me an exculpating line across the space reserved on the form for an itemized statement of incarcerations.

In Paris I bought most of my equipment, clothing for the tropics, a pith helmet, especially the folding camp bed and the mosquito net, without which no white man journeys in that part of Africa to which I was bound.

Suddenly I was ready, waiting pretty much alone in Paris for the *Vendôme* to come to Dunkerque.

There was a smash-up in an avenue one night, from which I salvaged a man whose face had been terribly cut by falling glass. It looked as if his eye had been destroyed. Some one had to take him at once to the hospital, and the policeman and the apothecary, who had a dozen less seriously wounded to handle, turned him over to me. Tramcars and auto buses, smashing glass, policemen and druggists, the swift ride in the taxi, with my charge beside the chauffeur on the front seat where the bloodstains would not matter, the receiving room at the hospital, with the pretty nurses powdering their noses, and the young internes, who decided on a glance to do nothing for François Cami—his was so obviously a case for the surgeon, who would come after a while: I do not know what was more striking—the potency of our civilization to damage, or its methodical means to restore.

A policeman came to the receiving room for notes and the names of witnesses. He took my name, but I said:

"I shall not be able to testify at the hearing. I am going away."

"When?" he asked.

"Tomorrow, or the next day, when the *Vendôme* shows up in Dunkerque."

"But perhaps you are not going far and can return for the hearing. We shall notify you."

"No," I answered. "I am going to Timbuctoo."
And we all laughed.

II

It was on the 17th of September we steamed out of Dunkerque, and at sunset time on November 11, I rode on a horse into Timbuctoo. So, you see, Timbuctoo is a fairly long way from Europe, if not as the bee flies, at least by the devious route and the various modes of travel by which one arrives there. To be sure, we were a month at sea on the way to Dakar, whereas few passenger boats put ten days to it; and just missing the Sudan Express from Dakar, I had a week to wait there for the next. There was a similar delay in Bamako. Yet granted the best connections, it is a long journey. I shall never have another like it, for there is not another Timbuctoo in the world to go to. Much happened in the course of it that was amusing, but much, also, that was trying; and take it all in all, I think that had I not been going to Timbuctoo, I should often have wished myself anywhere else than suffering some phase of the railway journey across Senegal and a large part of the Sudan.

What was most trying was not the heat, nor the many discomforts, nor the press of nervous travelers, nor even the ugliness of the country through which we passed, though here was appalling disillusion. This vast, unrelieved land, all in bleached rust tones, baking dry

under the sun, with its crackling tangle of grasses twice as high as a man, its grains high-stalked and angular, fierce as the jungle itself, its rare trees, monstrous in form now that the leaves were baked off them, its complete lack of trimness, of shade, its soil a stiffened dust, all in such nightmare confusion as only the microscope reveals: here confusion and struggle were magnified under a sun that leaves no shadow. Yet more distressing still was that the fact of being in a fair express train, with a crowd of white people and white people's nerves, with sleepers and a diner, with wine and ice and electric fans, was so irreconcilably at odds with crossing Africa. A surprising number of people believe the white man brings a lot to Africa and Asia; but I am quite sure that ninety per cent of what he brings is his own commonplaceness.

When the train stopped at a station, often no more than a mud building, we looked out; and what we saw was a crowd of black people, elegantly dressed, who looked at us with somewhat more inquisitive interest than we at them. This scrutiny, often solemn, often laughing, set us absurdly apart. You instinctively sought a lofty attitude, where you grew paler still with disdain.

After about forty-eight hours' going, we arrived in Bamako. It was ten-thirty in the morning. I had telegraphed from Dakar to know if the management could reserve me a room in the one hotel, the Buffet de la Gare; and the management had telegraphed that to

its regret it could not. But, deposited on the long station platform, we all flocked to find the manager, who was a cross man but an able one, and one who kept his head. He said flatly a hundred times that there were no rooms to be had. As I had my camp bed and my mosquito net, all I asked for was a corner on the upper gallery, and this he granted me at once. I could eat at the Buffet. A dozen black boys, each of whom pretended to be my best friend in the land, carried my luggage up to the gallery, set up my bed, hung the net. Oleanders were in bloom just below and the air was fragrant. But from my corner I looked down into the open-air movie theater alongside the hotel!

There was a show that night, which began about nine o'clock before an audience of perhaps two hundred blacks, men, women, and children. When the lights went out, their faces were lost in the darkness, and you saw only their white robes. The picture was an old one, almost effaced—a comedy featuring Charlie Chaplin and Mabel Normand. This was almost too much for me—to have come thousands of miles into a land famed for its mystery, and find myself watching an outworn American film. But I wished Chaplin could have been there to hear the black people laugh.

Two nights later the management gave me a room, the door of which opened on the veranda alongside the theater; and that night I pulled out a chair from my hot room and again watched the show. While it was going on lightning began to flash. With great sudden-

ness came the rain and the wind, and in a moment I found myself jammed with the whole audience against the door of my room. The harder the rain lashed in under the veranda, the more heavily the crowd pressed back against the wall, till we were wedged too tightly to move. It lasted for hours, that "tornado." It brought a great drop in the temperature, so that the black people, wet through, shivered. Little by little the youngsters sank down and fell asleep amid our feet. As the rain let up, one by one the men and women started for their homes, splashing through the puddles of the theater floor, disappearing. Then the moon came out, and in its light I saw black men asleep on the tiles of the veranda, as if they had been left motionless by the storm; and at the threshold of my room lay a black woman with two tiny children, all fast asleep. Not till long after I had gone to bed did I hear them stir. Through my open door I saw them drift silently and sleepily away.

Bamako spreads a little on a flat plain between the Niger and an eminence known as the Koluba, capped by the Government buildings. It was one of the great centers of the Bambara race, which still predominates there, though the native population is considerably mixed. The quasi-modern town is laid out in broad streets, all very flat, and there are shade trees, for which you will hear many a man in other Sudanese posts sigh. The French buildings are all in African style. How-

ever worthily or not the French may represent European civilization, at any rate they do not rear it up in eyesores there in the heart of Africa. Bamako is a pretty place. To the east and west of the modern town lie the big native villages, with rectangular streets and severe mud walls. From these the hollow beat of tom-toms at night comes to you in your room at the station.

In Bamako I had to arrange money matters, for there is no bank in Timbuctoo and hardly a means of procuring money there. I had more equipment to buy, especially a cooking outfit. Most important of all, I had to engage a servant, or "boy." This was my first great step into the life of the country. Everybody hires a boy, but the idea of engaging a personal servant for myself was one I did not entertain without excitement. From the time you land in Africa till the time you leave it, few white men allow you to forget that all blacks are lazy, all thieves, all liars, and that the threefold perfection of these vices is to be met with in the boy. The Government does what it can to protect the white man. Boys must be registered. Each boy must present his registration book when he applies for a job; and when the job is ended, he must take this book, together with what his boss has written in it of praise or disapproval, to a Government office for an official stamp. I was cautioned always to demand a book of any black man I should think of hiring.

I had been given a letter of introduction to a black

man in Bamako named Rassim Mademba, a native of great influence among his own people and at the same time a man who had made his way to a responsible position in the commercial enterprise of the whites. He was a tall man, with slightly gray hair, well dressed in the European fashion. I found him very busy and hesitated to present my letter, but he courteously insisted upon my doing so. He was interested at once by my being in Africa without any purpose. Most people come to that part of Africa on business, or with definite studies in mind, or a religion to preach.

In due time, when he asked me how he could be of service, I told him what I had heard of the viciousness of boys, and requested him please to find me a boy on whom I could reasonably depend. On the next morning when I went to his office, he sent out for the boy already secured for me. So Omar joined me, a timid, soft-voiced lad of eighteen, black as ebony, dressed in immaculate white robes. Being so ignorant of the ways of the country, I knew not what to say to him; Mademba made the conditions. Omar was to cook for me, wait on me, wash my clothes, and act generally as guide and interpreter. He spoke French very well, by the way. I was to pay him generously—one hundred francs a month, twenty-five more, I imagine, than he had ever before received. Did he want a little money in advance? All boys want a little money in advance, usually to buy something for their wives or their mothers whom they

OMAR

are to leave. Omar timidly said he wanted money to buy something for his aunt.

He came to the hotel that afternoon to fetch my soiled clothes, and I wonder which of us was the more nervous. I had been solemnly advised on many occasions that one must from the very start let one's boy know who is master; but for the life of me I could think of nothing to be masterful about. Omar asked for money to buy soap with and charcoal to heat the flatiron; I failed to recognize the occasion for awful display. I should have roared: "After money already, eh? Get out of here and wash those clothes, quick! And if you break a button on that coat, I'll break your neck." Instead, I asked Omar how much he wanted; and when he mentioned fifty centimes, gave them to him instead of throwing them at him, which would have been an effective gesture.

I had three or four days yet to wait in Bamako, and there was hardly an hour of those days when I was not making myself miserable trying to find something for Omar to do, lest he be ruined by idleness. Once I made him unpack and pack all my things; but while this gave him an insight into my belongings, I felt so ashamed of all the bother that I regretted having caused it. In a rather masterly way, I showed him how I wished some of my things packed; but he knew more about packing than ever I had known. All the time, what I really wished to say to Omar was this: "Look here, I am a stranger, and a very ignorant one, in this country of yours. You look out for things, will you? And

come round to-night and take me for a walk through the native villages and introduce me to your friends."

Meanwhile, I hunted up an American missionary in town and he invited me to come and stay with him, which I did. I remember asking him once if it was necessary to yell at black boys as I heard men yelling at them all day and most of the night. He was a mild man, but he looked at me with a twinkle in his eye. "You have not been very long in Africa yet," he answered, "but before long you'll find yourself ready to yell at them."

In a six years' stay at Bamako, this missionary had made one convert, a young man named Demba. Demba always made me feel like Satan in disguise, of whom, of course, he thoroughly disapproved; so I did not like him much.

My host had spent many years in Morocco. After we had turned in for the night, he would forget the sinful state of the world and the imminence of the Day of Judgment in recalling the beauty of Fez.

"And, ah, do you remember how the waters rushed, the gardens, the flowering trees over the tops of the walls, the smell of jasmine and orange blossoms, the nightingales, the moonlight?"

I often wondered how he could have consistently preached to the Moroccan Arabs to deny, in favor of a heavenly home, the beauties of a land which he could not, even after many years, recall to himself without a certain rapture.

III

But here in the heart of the French Sudan we were a long way from Morocco, and among a very different people, as I was now to learn. The Arabs in Morocco had been extraordinarily hospitable to me—not the notables, but the ordinary people of the streets. They were, I believe, intuitively aware that I felt my race was in no way superior to theirs and that I felt I owed them both respect and courtesy in every relation. I was disposed to feel a similar obligation towards the blacks.

Therefore, when, one afternoon, after I had had an interview with Rassim Mademba, an elegant black man approached me with kind words, I could not rebuff him. Finding that I was uncertain of the way back to the hotel, he offered to accompany me; and as we walked along together he was moved to more kindly offers, even inviting me to come sometime to his house and eat kouskous with him. I was deeply pleased by this chance, the first which had offered itself, to penetrate into the life of the blacks.

All along the way to the hotel, men ran out from their shops and their doorways to grasp his hand; he accepted their greetings with a lordly air. I could only conclude that he was a native of some importance, and I found more to admire than to laugh at in his grandeur. Mind you, this was my first experience.

When we arrived at the hotel, I wished to repay his courtesy, but was at a loss how to do so. A gift of

money to such a notable seemed to me out of the question; I had nothing about my person I could part with. Finally, being hot and thirsty myself, I thought he might be so likewise, and I invited him to come in and have a drink with me. He appeared both surprised and pleased, and accepted the invitation.

We took a side table in the open-air inclosure behind the hotel which served as café. There were at that time no other guests. Knowing he was a Mohammedan, I assumed that he would refuse wine or spirits, and suggested a lemonade, which was what I myself thirsted for. But no; when the waiter came, my guest ordered a "bitter," a drink of which I happened to have no knowledge. The waiter returned with my lemonade and a tall glass for my friend, into which he poured a couple of fingers of bitter. As he started to return with the bottle, my guest spoke sharply to him in the native tongue; whereupon, with an uneasy look, the waiter handed over the bottle, and my elegant companion more than half filled his glass with bitter.

We had been sipping only a little while when it became evident that bitter is strong drink. My friend's speech grew thick, his invitations to his house importunate. I must go eat with him that very night; what was more, we must go at once to meet his two wives, on whose good grace would depend my reception. Within ten minutes he was really drunk and growing wild.

Most white men hold it something worse than a crime

to put liquor in the way of the blacks, who have as yet very little knowledge of it. Though I had been ignorant of the nature of "bitter," I had none the less an uncomfortable guilty feeling now. The more guilty I felt, the less could I resent my friend's behavior. Men and women, arriving now for their *apéritif,* eyed us askance. At last I snapped up a passionate invitation to go to his house, and summoned the waiter to pay the bill.

Change for big bills is so scarce in the country that you usually carry your money in wads of five-franc notes, the bulkiness of which gives the impression of untold wealth. I tried to count off the money I needed covertly; but my friend leaned over to see, and not only saw, but fell sprawling from his chair. Fortunately, I caught him and could set him up again in place. Thereupon, with a broad smile, he spoke to the waiter in a rambling, maudlin way. The waiter grew plainly embarrassed and refused to interpret. So my guest turned to me and unctuously mentioned a matter of ten francs owing for liquor he had drunk here at the hotel the evening before. I would, of course, pay this for him; and he would repay me at his house, whither we were going at once.

I paid, chiefly to put an end to the whole scene. No sooner had I given the waiter the extra money, than my guest asked me to lend him fifty francs. But I said this could better be settled elsewhere, and so got him outside and away from the hotel.

The sun had all but set; night would come swiftly. When we arrived at a quiet place, I begged off going farther, pleading the lateness of the hour and my own fatigue. Something of the man's suave elegance returned to him; he affected being hurt. It was only a little way to his house; at least I must come and meet his wives, so that all might be arranged for a feast on the next night. I believed that it might be but a little way, and being still curious to see the inside of a native compound, I went on with him.

He talked meanwhile on a text I have since become well acquainted with. He was a Soussi from Guinea. (I remembered that is where the cannibals dwell, but made no comment.) He was not, therefore, of the race of the Sudan. That is why I could trust him, he said. The men of this country were without exception thieves and liars. Let me be on my guard. They would ask me to lend them money; but their word was false and they would never repay the money I lent. Whereas, the word of a Soussi was a sacred bond. If I lent him two hundred and fifty francs, he would pay me on the morrow. This is, I find, exactly the way the white races talk about each other under similar urge; so I was not gaining an insight into Africa.

But it was growing very dark, and we were walking swiftly on, quite through one big native village and out into the gloomy wastes beyond. At last I stopped and declared positively that it was too late to go farther;

that I began already to doubt if I could find my way safely back to the hotel. He took my arm and pointed into the darkness beyond. Did I not see the wall of the village ahead, there? If it were not for the wall, I should see the supper fires glowing.

We stumbled on a few steps and indeed brought up against a low wall, which we followed a little way, till I was suddenly pushed through an opening into a native compound. Vaguely against the sky I saw the conical thatched roofs of the huts. To my left on the ground sat two black women, dim figures in the glow from the little charcoal fire. One of them brought a stool for me to sit on. My host sat on a mat and lit his pipe. So at last one of my dreams was realized: I was within a native dwelling place; but I confess that I no sooner found myself settled there than I began scheming how to get out.

Not that I was afraid. My big host was still a little unsteady on his feet; the compound was large enough for a good bit of dodging; besides, a man in a hurry could have vaulted the low inclosing wall. No; my host had a mind to entertain me, and his two wives were laughing seductively. So far, so delightful. Yet I knew that I was expected to pay generously for being received in the highest degree of intimacy.

I wish I could have been as polite as they; but we northerners are a crude lot. My standing up, with a flat statement of my intention of leaving at once, was

boorish. I strode, none the less, towards the opening in the wall.

"But," cried my host, "you cannot leave ladies like that. You must bid them good night and ask to be allowed to come and see them again."

Shaking off his hand on my arm, I threw back a dispassionate expression of thanks. Then, when I turned, I saw the figure of a tall man with a club on his shoulder standing in the opening in the wall. I advanced upon him; but when I had come almost up to him, he—moved aside and bade me good night.

My friendly host, laughing, followed me from the compound and started with me along the wall on the way home. But soon he stopped short. "Oh, my dictionary!" he cried in some agitation. "I have forgotten my dictionary!" And he ran back. After waiting a long while, I set out on my way alone. Since I never saw him again, I shall never know whether or not he came running after me through the dark with his dictionary.

This was my first informal experience with an African native. Had not my own sense of guilt been present with me all through it—after all, his drunkenness was at my hands—it would have influenced my subsequent attitude. This, I am thankful, it did not. But it taught me that however I was to associate with the black people, it would not be on quite the same terms as with the Moroccans, who had spoiled me.

IV

The day came for me to move on toward Timbuctoo. There was a short train ride down to Koulikoro, just below the rocks and shallows which make the river unnavigable for big boats round Bamako. At Koulikoro I was to take the Niger steamer.

Omar packed my luggage, and this, together with his own little box, was at the station in plenty of time for the train. I meant to travel first class; I learned by inquiry that my boy should travel fourth, that is, with the crowd of natives in the open freight car or two. So I bought tickets accordingly.

Now, I had had already that early morning one unpleasant surprise, and this was Omar in jacket and khaki trousers and dark, horn-rimmed spectacles. The native costume is far more beautiful than ours, and the black man, with few exceptions, is at his worst when he dons clothes like ours. For he affects with them our bluster and our arrogance.

Omar came up to me on the station platform in this good-as-you-are rig, and said there was no place left in fourth class. To be sure, the open freight cars were jammed, but I had not yet seen a crowd of black people so thick that another individual might not work his way into it. Omar wished, nevertheless, to travel third, and I did not know what to do.

As my ignorance struggled with my temper over this matter, who should appear but Demba, the mission-

ary's only convert, the only Christian black man in Bamako. He had run to the station to bid me good-by and to present me with a copy of a Christian Missions' paper. This was written in English, of which Demba knew not a word; and I think his presentation was a gesture akin to Omar's wearing dark glasses. However, I looked upon Demba as a *deus ex machina* arrived in time to settle my trouble. I told him about Omar, and asked him what I should do.

Demba looked at me a moment, a handsome, lofty black boy, indeed.

"Have you a Bible with you?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I haven't, Demba," I answered.

"The Good Book is a refuge in all troubles," Demba pronounced; and then, declaring his ignorance of the etiquette for boys traveling with their masters, shook hands generously and went away.

So I addressed myself to a French official, who, hearing my tale and catching sight of Omar very airy in his white man's clothes, made as if he would belt him.

"What sort of trick are you playing, eh?" he shouted at Omar. "Get on that train!"

And Omar got on—in fourth class.

In a few minutes I was sitting alone in a first-class compartment, the blinds drawn against the sun. I had with me two duffle bags, an iron pail full of cooking and eating utensils, with a coffeepot attached to it by a string, a lantern, my Corona, and Omar's little box. I wondered if Omar would stay by me all the way to Tim-

buctoo. It was some reassurance to keep my heel on that trunk.

Koulikoro—well, there is a native village of mud huts along the river bank; there is a hill, too, steep and at the mercy of the sun; and on top of the hill there is a big building, the hotel, which has five rooms and yet is vast. It is almost always empty, save for the black manager and his henchman, Ba, and the swallows which fly twittering through its galleries. From the door of my chamber I looked through an arch down upon the brazen Niger.

Having a night and a day to wait here, I ordered Omar (with great firmness) to take me for a walk. This he did, and a pleasant young companion he was, walking over the long hot road by the river, with the red, panther-haunted rocks to the left, telling me stories, teaching me words in Bambara, ducking into a compound here and there to show me a native at his craft, introducing me graciously to the ways of the land in which I felt more than ever a stranger. I think he enjoyed it. He brought two friends up to the hotel to see me, young men who had returned from Paris, whither they had gone to exhibit in the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs.

We had another walk. Seeing a long native canoe plying as a ferry, I expressed the intention to cross the river. Omar hailed the ferrymen, who had already set out on a crossing, and the ferrymen returned to shore. As I remembér, there were already at least half a dozen

big black men in the leaky craft. We had seen men bathing cautiously by the edge of the stream; and when I asked Omar if they knew not how to swim and so were afraid of the water, he told me that they swam well enough for men, but not so well as crocodiles.

Now I looked at the overladen canoe and then at the wide expanse of the river. I asked if the canoes sometimes tipped over, and the boatmen, laughing, replied that they often did so. Some of the black passengers moved their calabashes and their rolls of mats to make room for my boy and me; others began to bail. We got aboard. What is more, after the two boatmen had pushed a way upstream along the shore, they turned suddenly to head across the river, and grabbing little heart-shaped paddles, dashed at the water with such might that I soon lost all fear of crocodiles in admiration of their strength and their skill. So I first ventured upon the Niger, so was first splashed with its waters. In that moment was born my confidence in the black boatmen, which never wavered during the fifteen-hundred-mile journey I was later to take in their care down this same river, which is at once so commonplace and so grand.

V

How describe the river steamer which took us in four days and nights down to Kabara? She was a long, flat steel craft, with no superstructure except the deck

A BAMBARA COMPOUND

shanties that served as cabins and saloon. There was no deck space save amidships, where the fourth-class black passengers were herded, and a bit at the bow, three-quarters of which was reserved for the black pilots. There were four cabins, I think, each with two bunks, hung with mosquito nets full of holes and tears. The boilers burned wood, and we went downstream with a steel fuel barge alongside, on which some of the fourth-class passengers now and again found a place to lie down in. We had a couple of barges in tow, besides. She was named the *Bonnier,* this most incommodious river boat, after a young French colonel who had been killed near Timbuctoo.

We started out with more white people than the *Bonnier* had decent room for, and hundreds of blacks and Moors. Late at night I found a free corner forward. A Frenchman came up and began talking to me. He said something I did not hear clearly and mistook for a light-hearted remark. I laughed.

"I said," he repeated after a minute, "that I had just buried my wife."

He was a young man, tall and thin. No casual grief spoke there. Besides, he was miserable with dysentery. In the tranquillity of the late night, close by the silent black steersmen outlined against the stars, he poured out the whole story. They were in a distant post, he and his wife and their young son, happy in spite of hardships and the heat; very well, too. Then she fell ailing. Since there was no doctor within call, they did

what their experience of the land prompted. A headache is so often but a touch of fever. There were the purges, the extra doses of quinine, the diet, the additional repose. But the headache grew more and more violent. So the man got word to Segou to send an airplane quickly and take his wife to the hospital in Bamako. The aviator lost his way and returned to Segou; set out again and had a breakdown; set out a third time and got to the post and took the wife, by then in agony, and brought her to Bamako. For a day or two she seemed to recover, but then she died.

"You are going for mere pleasure into this land," he said, "and you won't find it a hard land at all. But God help the man whose career brings him to live here. I have had enough. It is a hell, nothing less." In a moment he added: "Africa is all right if you keep your health. Timbuctoo is a very healthy place, by the way. You will perhaps see Touaregs there." And putting aside his grief for a little while, he told me stories of the Touaregs, among whom he had once lived.

It was better luck almost than I could believe that all the white passengers left the boat at Segou the next morning, and I was left alone with the purser, with the members of the black crew, and with the swarming mass of black passengers and Moors. The purser was a delightful companion and an excellent provider. He did not belong with the boat at all, but had at a moment's notice consented to take the place of the regular purser, who had gone to the hospital with a heavy attack

of fever. He had seen the *Bonnier* for the first time only a few hours before she left Koulikoro on this trip. My regret at seeing so many white passengers at the start, it now appeared, had been nothing compared with his consternation.

"What should I have done," he asked, when we were well down from Segou and had the boat to ourselves, "inexperienced as I am, with all that crowd to handle on a boat that owns not a single comfort? How should I have fed them? How could I have stood up against their faultfinding?"

Now he had nothing to do but order repasts for himself and me, which, since he was something of an epicure, was a pleasure rather than a duty. He planned; there was a black cook, a master; and Abdullah was as perfect a steward and attendant as ever lived. As for the rest of the boat's business, well, he had a few papers to sign. The black mate put them under his hand. The black crew ran the ship entirely. How could it be otherwise? Did I know anything about a boat? If so, I knew more about the *Bonnier* to start with than he knew or ever should know.

I revealed to him the great confidence I was already beginning to feel in the blacks; and with a knowing look, he told me he felt as I felt. That is why the blacks did so well by him. Day and night the *Bonnier* went smoothly on its way downstream, with its two white men who knew not an inch of the way, not a trick of the boat; and it touched at every village of call on time,

discharged and took on cargo; black passengers got off at their destinations and others got on; we stopped for wood, and wood never lacked; the engines never faltered.

Near the middle of one night we stopped at a post in the very wilderness. I think we carried mail. There were no passengers to disembark and there was no cargo. The purser and I were about to go ashore and stretch our legs a bit, when word came down from a mysterious white doctor that no one must land from the *Bonnier*. There had come rumors of a case of yellow fever several hundred miles upstream.

I remember the twinkle in Abdullah's eye when I fell back on the boat.

"Stay aboard with me, white man," he said. "I'll give you good things to eat."

The purser and I met only at lunch and at dinner; the rest of the time I was alone. During the heat of the day, which was most of the day, I could write in the box which was the saloon, or lurk in my cabin. It was fiercely hot. On either side of the river spread the Sudan, as far as the horizon and farther, on a level with the water itself, and almost as flat. The view was, so to speak, all light. The river being high, we saw neither crocodiles nor hippopotamuses; but there were thousands of birds, thousands upon thousands of them—ducks and geese strangely colored, cranes, tufted herons, white pelicans, and grotesque birds the like of which I had never seen even in the screeching aviaries of zoos.

One day a group of Moors came to my cabin door. They were tall, lean men, very dirty, with shocks of long curls, dressed in loose blue stuff, the dye of which had smudged their necks and arms with blue. The tallest of them without a word held out a poisoned finger to me. After I had treated it, they lingered a few minutes; and we tried to talk, but I could not understand their Arabic, and they were so surprised at mine that I suppose they did not understand it.

They all returned the next day for me to wash and bandage Sidi Mohammed's finger again. The finger was worse rather than better, but the Moors were more friendly. They, like me, were going to Timbuctoo.

Hardly had I finished bandaging the finger, when two black men of the crew presented themselves with cuts and bruises on their legs; then others came, complaining of headache or stomach ache, and requesting a quinine pill. There were plenty of bandages and ordinary medicines aboard that boat, and the purser would willingly have treated these men. Why, then, did they come to me? They were curious. The blacks seem to beg shamelessly; but it is fair to remember that because of the attitude the whites think it wisest to maintain, one of sacrosanct superiority, a black man may hardly approach a white otherwise than with some grace, some favor, to demand. Yet the black man is curious as a child, and even more friendly.

I had bought in Las Palmas a small guitar, and I used to pass an hour or so of the afternoon, while it was

still too hot to enjoy being outside, picking out scales and chords on it in my cabin. Invariably some of the black passengers, hearing the sound, stole from their quarters to my cabin door, and there stood silent, looking and perhaps listening. I was often tempted to drive them off, for their bodies shut my cabin in so close. (Besides, I was ashamed to have them hear me play so badly.) Once I turned to order them away; but the sight of their black faces, so intent and so wholly without malice, defeated me. I handed them over the guitar. They turned it this way and that, passed it from one to another, fingered it, gingerly plucked a string. Then they handed it back, smiling, and asked me how much it had cost. After that, only two used to come regularly.

They were a young man and his brother, both fishermen, coal-black Bozos; and they would come to my door in the morning to wish me good day, and again in the night, to wish me blessed rest. They were to leave the boat at some river village, I forget the name, where we arrived after dark. As I stood at the rail, watching the movement of the crowd, which was distinctly only a weaving of thin black legs in the light of lanterns swinging low, I kept an eye out for these two. But I missed them. After a while I had enough of watching and returned to my cabin door on the other side of the boat, and the motionless grandeur of the stars, which seemed fixed both in the dark heavens and in the water of the river, and every night more brilliant, as we came into the drier air of the desert.

The boat whistled its readiness to depart. Just after, two figures approached me silently from the shadow. They were the two brothers, out of breath and sweating. In imperfect French the elder explained that they had first of all had to carry their belongings to their hut, which was a bit far from the boat; and then they had run back to bid me good-by. The younger, who knew no French, watched me with a smile. The delicacy and the grace with which they performed this little act of farewell are not wholly unknown to us; but we attribute such fineness of sentiment and such simplicity of act to breeding, which most frequently makes a mummery of them. No courtliness, I believe, could match the refinement of these two black fishermen.

It was a bother getting to bed in my bunk, tucking the mosquito netting in. I was always bitten, too, on knees and elbows, hands and feet, which in the turnings of my slumber were pushed to the net. The black pilots slept in watches forward on the deck. They laid a straw mat on the floor, knelt in prayer a moment, and rolling themselves in their outer robes, lay down on the mat and slept without turning.

Hot and monotonous as the days were, this voyage was not commonplace. Every day brought its sunset hour, and that was full of miracles. Not that there was anything sensational; the spaces about us were too empty; but all the light, which was all the view, softened into color, became color. The water, like the air, softened without shadow. Perhaps everybody on board, ex-

cept the purser and me, sought during this silent, lucent modulation, a place apart; and there, facing the east, stood a moment or two with uplifted head before kneeling, majestically a human being in the spell of a faith. Allah is wholly of the spirit; no image of him has been made and no picture ever painted. He prevails in the desert and in the spaces like those about us as we went down the Niger, where the sun is merciless and the twilight clear wine.

As night fell, the small cook fires of the travelers aboard began to twinkle. They kindled them here and there on the iron deck, on stern and bow of the iron barges we had in tow. Sometimes a group would build a bigger fire for themselves, and against the edge of the world you saw fire and pot, and a statuesque black man at the cooking.

In the starry night, cooler than the day, the thud of fuel wood thrown from the attendant barge into the stoke hole without clang or clatter of steel shovel, the swish of the softly parted water, wherein the stars shone even as they shone in the sky: these sounds faded into an echoless, spacious silence.

About the middle of the afternoon, on November 11, we reached our destination, Kabara, a few small mud buildings by the river. My baggage was put ashore, on the sand, the sand of the southern Sahara. Now I needed a horse for myself and a donkey for my baggage. There were five miles to go north from the river to Timbuctoo. Armistice Day was a holiday even here,

and I did not at once procure the horse and the donkey. The purser advised me to stay aboard the boat that night and go on to Timbuctoo in the morning; but I was impatient of delay. So when at last we found the beasts, Omar set out with the luggage and the donkey, and I got on the back of a little horse, into a rickety saddle with stirrups so short that my knees knocked on the horse's ears. A man approached and accompanied me a little way, talking in a mixture of Arabic and French, of which I understood hardly more than that he would be my friend, and I his; his house in Kabara would be mine, as mine in Timbuctoo would be his. I never saw him again.

It was dull weather, and the sand rose in dust. I let my horse take his own pace, which was somewhat slower than that of the donkey with my baggage. A drove of donkeys, loaded with freight from the *Bonnier,* overtook me and went on out of sight through the sandy dunes and the groves of dusty thorn trees. I did not doubt my horse knew the way; but he seemed indifferent and disinclined to go anywhere. There was a ford to pass, for water backs up through a canal from the Niger to Timbuctoo; and at the ford I came up with my donkey and the drove, the donkey boys and Omar, with my lantern and my umbrella. But we were no sooner across than they went on out of sight again, and I jogged on alone. Getting to Timbuctoo was not unlike getting home to your house in a remote suburb after a wearying day in the city.

My chief preoccupation was the question of a night's lodging, for no doubt it would be dark when I arrived in the mysterious city; yet none the less, after the long and sometimes doubtful voyage, the knowledge that the end was at hand gave me the quite ordinary sense of going home.

My horse bore me down into a long open way, and I turned him north. A group of three superb black men with lofty turbans and flowing robes came galloping down the way; and they waved me a greeting as they passed. I called after them to know if indeed I was headed towards Timbuctoo, and one wheeled and returned to keep me company. Bridle, reins, and saddle of his horse were studded with brass, and brass medallions tinkled to the animal's spirited caperings.

The sun had broken through the clouds low in the west, and my companion hinted that I was too gentle with my own mount. It was getting late. But I was of no mind to vie with him in a race towards the city. I could not ride as he could, nor even speak French with the same easy flow. He recounted something of his own history, and without reserve informed me of his own importance in the land; that is, that he was attached to the Government. From me he got nothing but the truth—that I was an unimportant voyager, curious to see Timbuctoo and live there awhile.

"*La voilà,*" he said.

It lay close upon the sands about half a mile before

us. My eyes might have missed it for some time to come, partly because it did not rise against the sky and had at first view no feature, but more because it blended in color, and, if I may say so, in texture with the surrounding desert. The sunset was now aflame, throwing a glow into all the air. The fine dust of the sand was like an ethereal golden veil, through which, as if it were a length of some such gauze collapsed into substance but hardly into form upon the sands, I first saw Timbuctoo, faintly tinged with violet.

At the entrance to the city Omar was sitting on a stone with the donkey boy. The donkey, with my bags and buckets and my Corona, waited before them. It was growing dark and shadowy. I remembered there were American missionaries in the city, and asked my escort to direct the donkey boy to their house. This he did, and then, with a spectacular wheel of his horse, galloped off.

We went on across a wide open place and into a street, which was narrower than a lane between the low mud walls of the houses; and in the gloom we turned many angles. From nowhere appeared two young men at my stirrup, one bareheaded, the other with an orange turban. They were in danger of being squeezed against the walls, but they still walked beside me, telling me they were the chosen friends of the missionaries, and that they would be my best friends as well.

One more sharp turn we made, and stopped before

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a big door. I dismounted and went to knock, but one of the black youths opened without knocking. The missionaries came down into the courtyard where I stood and called in my donkey and Omar. So at last, with my baggage and my boy, I had got to Timbuctoo.

Chapter II: Settling

I

TIMBUCTOO IS A SMALL, isolated town of perhaps ten thousand inhabitants, gathered closely unto itself and flattened under a sea of light. As far as its appearance goes, I shall think of it always less as substantial than as a phenomenon of light. Yet there are the houses and the low contiguous walls between which the alleys meander senselessly. Everything is built of beaten earth, with an outer coat smooth as plaster; in general of a putty color, sometimes ruddier, sometimes more yellow, but in any case hardly defined from the color of the sand. All the roofs are flat, the parapets square. A few houses have two stories; and in the walls of these you will see tiny windows with miniature wooden screens carved in Moorish style instead of glass. Here and there is a portico with an Egyptian look. But in general the smooth walls are unbroken and unmarked. Doorways are flush with them. You step from the sand of the alleys over the threshold to the beaten earth of courtyard or low vestibule within. In the drifting sands bare feet or

slippered, the hoofs of donkeys and the unshod hoofs of horses, the padded feet of camels, all tread soundlessly. No carriage, no cart, no automobile; no roadway, no sidewalk; no crowd in the streets, only in the laughing, chattering, squabbling market place. But what sun, what clarity of light and air, unless the wind chances to blow and the sand spins high. Those gray, smooth walls assimilate light. Sometimes you would think them radiant of themselves, and at sunset time they glow, as the sand glows, with the colors of the air.

On the morning after my arrival I walked across the market place and presented my letter to Monsieur Abd El-Kadir El Barka, a Moorish merchant. Him I found sitting at a small iron table in a room back of his shop, reserved and keen in the confusion of Touaregs and Moors and black men, all of whom seemed to be doing business with him at once. Having read the letter, he welcomed me warmly, and, knowing that I needed a lodging, left his business and took me himself through the town and showed me the houses available. I decided that morning upon one of them, and the next day installed myself therein.

This house was at the northern end of the market place, one of the biggest and highest in the city, from many points of view the best. There were two stories and eight big rooms, together with a smaller room or two. The rent, it may be worth telling, was considerably less than two dollars a month. One entered from a

MY HOUSE IN TIMBUCTOO

sandy lane; the big door was heavy and studded with copper nails and creaked loudly as one pushed it in. A short vestibule, wide and high and somewhat crumbling, led into the courtyard. Do not imagine a tiled patio, with a fountain and green things growing. It was like a wide, desiccated stable yard, wholly bare to the sun, sandy. On two sides of it the second story of the house had collapsed into mounds of broken earth, from which protruded unstripped palm logs and the edges of straw matting. On the left stood a low compartment of two rooms below the level of the court itself, one of which might once have served as a kitchen, the other as a slave's room. The mud walls of both were scratched deep with Arabic texts and African symbols. On the right, however, the still smooth walls of the house rose to two stories, and in these were doors heavy as the entrance door and, like it, studded with nails; and these doors opened into long and lofty rooms, cool, silent, bare, and so shadowy, for they were windowless, that for a minute or two after the glare of the court you could not see the end of them or the closely laid palm logs and matting of the ceiling. Like a dark tablet, the even floor of beaten earth seemed to invite footprints and some record of an invading life. One of these Omar promptly chose for his kitchen.

From the northwest corner of the courtyard an irregular flight of stairs, steep and narrow as a ladder, led to the terrace above, whence, over a parapet high as your shoulders, you could look down into the market

place, or, east and west, quite over the low city, over the low surrounding sands, even to the rim of the desert, an horizon unruffled save in the west, where in certain lights you could see the hills of Gundam lying low and blue.

On the north side were the upstairs apartments, one of them open on one side to the terrace, a sort of loggia, serving as anteroom to the chamber which I chose for myself to live in. There were doors of heavy wood, cumbersome for their size and ill-fitted. The room itself was long from east to west, and fairly high; and in the north wall were two small windows without glass, even without grills and shutters, perennially open to the light and air of the desert, which they surveyed. The earth floor was uneven and so dry that a stout housewifely attack on it with a broom might have soon swept it all away down to the mats and rafters which were the ceiling of the room below and which I sometimes felt billowing under my tread. In large patches the pale blue lime wash which had once freshened the walls had crumbled off.

However ruined and neglected the dwelling might seem, you could not say that it was dirty. In this land the dry air and the sun, to which little is impervious, simply annihilate filth. You cannot imagine a cleaner place than Timbuctoo. If my first act of possession was to buy a broom for Omar, a queer native broom, that was not to sweep out the dust, a procedure which would eventually have reduced and even obliterated the house,

but to dislodge the scorpions which Omar and I feared were living in the corners.

Leaving Omar to evict the scorpions, I went out to the market to buy coarse, hand-woven straw mats for the floor of my chamber. A young black lad, who had appeared in the house as soon as we had taken possession and had simply attached himself to the household, accompanied me. His name was Alfa. With Alfa, then, I bought the mats. He carried them back to the house on his head, and together we laid them over the floor of the chamber, which they covered neatly. Then we set up the folding table I had brought all the way from Paris, the ridiculous little folding chair; we set up my folding camp bed and hung the mosquito net from an unstripped palm log. But I did not unpack my clothes, for there was not even a nail in the wall to hang a coat from.

Taking Alfa with me, I went again to the market, this time to buy vessels for water and two earthenware braziers for cook fires. Little naked black boys brought the water jars back to the house on their heads. There were five jars, some very big, others small, all generously rounded, reddish in color, with a single white band and scroll for ornament. These being slightly porous in texture, some moisture seeps through them, the continuous evaporation of which keeps the water within refreshingly cool. Hardly had we set them in place when the water carrier appeared, one of the many humble, honest black men, not always of the native race,

who earn a living by fetching water in goatskin bags atop their heads from the wells just outside the city to the west. A skin of water weighs from seventy-five to a hundred pounds. The necks of these hard toilers are short and thick. From sunrise to sunset you meet them in the sandy streets, half trotting in a pace peculiar to them under their heavy load.

Two skins filled our jars. Unused to the land and to this provisioning of water, I asked our carrier to bring us two skins regularly a day, but we never used that much. Even with bathing and laundry, three skins in two days was the most we ever needed. You pay the water man by the month at so much a skin—two cents a skin, if I remember correctly. Our man never once failed us. He had the smile of a backward child, surprising always. Though he spoke not a single word of French, we used to converse silently.

I had failed to find braziers in the market place, but a black man came up on the terrace with two. How he knew I wanted them remains a secret; but everybody in Timbuctoo knows what you want, or should want, or might want, or may be persuaded to want, about as soon as the possibility of wanting anything flashes into your mind.

Then an old woman, on whom we had merely smiled, appeared with a big sack of charcoal on her head. She was ugly: her teeth were half gone; her breasts hung like empty meal sacks. But she had a bright, merry eye, and she cackled away in some language neither Omar

MOULAY, THE WATER CARRIER

nor I could understand, and puffed at her pipe and spat and laughed. The charcoal made a shiny black heap in the courtyard. When she left, Alfa told me she swore I should never lack for charcoal so long as I lived in Timbuctoo, which might Allah make a long, long while.

Now, Omar took money and went with Alfa to the market to buy food, and I went to beg a real table and some chairs from Monsieur Abd El-Kadir, which he granted at once; and then to buy old packing cases from the French storekeepers, for which they exacted a high price; and then to buy nails; and then to borrow a hammer and a saw from the missionaries. And all these things were carried to my house by naked little black boys; for the etiquette of the country forbids the white man to show himself carrying anything.

By sunset time I had constructed some shelves on the walls of my room and converted a big packing case into a combination wardrobe and toilet table. My garments hung from nails. Another packing case made a good cupboard for the kitchen. There were eggs and coffee, butter and salt and sugar in the larder. A shepherd would bring milk in the morning. So I left Omar preparing an evening meal and went to walk with Alfa, who led me out of the town, across the sands to the edge of the pool, which is filled by water backed up from the Niger through an ancient canal. Here we both bathed, but bathed, it seemed to me, no more in water than in the wash of color, the diffusion of color in sand

and air which is the marvelous sunset light of Timbuctoo. In the brief twilight we returned to the house, whence, from the terrace, I watched the great stars come swiftly forth into their eternal places. Silently in his bare feet Omar mounted the stairs, silently went into my room, lit the lantern, and announced to me that supper was ready. I failed to note the menu of this first meal, but I remember it was excellent and that I knew I had found in Omar not only an intelligent and honest boy, but a skilled cook as well.

On the next morning came two merchants with local wares and curios to sell: ostrich eggs, leather cushion covers, Touareg daggers, bits of cloth, and other things which might impress a stranger's fancy. My room needed a bit of decoration, so I invited them in, and they sat with me on the mats. One was largely Arab; the other was a black man of the country. Though they sought me out only for the money they could persuade me to spend, we became after a fashion friends. I knew nothing of the local values of the articles I wished from time to time to buy. As a rule, however, you offer half or a quarter of the price asked, and this I always did. Instead of resenting the rude baseness of my proposal, they gasped at it, and then all but hid their expressive faces in their turbans so that I might not see how grossly I had shocked them. They would talk quietly among themselves, with looks at me so full of tender feeling that I knew they were doing their best to spare me a revelation of my own barbarism.

Therefore, the harder I stuck to my offer, the more ashamed did I feel. Then the instant they closed the bargain at my price, I knew I had overpaid.

But what of it? Prices were absurdly low, and there was no shame in having paid for a thing you wanted a few francs more than a native would have paid. A white man must always pay a little more. Perhaps most black merchants and Arabs would rather sell nothing to a European than sell to him at the price they would accept from a native.

With the few things I bought from these merchants, with the table and the two chairs Monsieur Abd El-Kadir lent me, with a steamer chair the missionaries sent over, my room was comfortable. For me it had, if not beauty, a definite character which was pleasing. This was owing, I dare say, less to the furnishings than to the light. I must maintain that Timbuctoo remains for me, physically, a many-phased phenomenon of light. A thousand and one things might compose themselves into scenes, so to speak; but the vividness of those scenes, the quality which is unforgettable in them, was the light which played over and through them and in which color was evenly diffused as it may be in transparent liquids. There was no view, no vista, in this land. If one walked through Timbuctoo one was far more conscious of the overpowering sky than of the low smooth walls between which one wandered. If one looked down upon the city, as from my terrace, one could only feel, for all the movement of figures across the market place

below, how little the town raised itself above the surrounding desert, how flattened to the lowest level everything was under the ocean of the brilliant air.

With its windows to the north and its doors giving on the sun-drenched terrace, my room was open to this ocean. It was open to every phase of the light, with its colors, never sensational, but magical as faint music, as impalpable and as all-pervading.

Through my voyage across Africa the fact had slowly been borne in on me that all I could hope to gain out of the empty land was some knowledge of the native life in it. Timbuctoo was to fulfill this hope. The natives came to my house. And all I have to record of my stay there is a handful of little stories of these people, very definite in fact, perhaps too definite in detail for a good story. It is all real and commonplace; there is no spell in it at all. Yet, when these facts have faded from my memory, there will still remain the vision of the people, their appearance in the light of that land, in the light of that land, even, which pervaded my chamber. Therein lay the spell, perhaps ineffable.

Soundlessly in their bare feet, black man, Arab, Moor, Berber, they came up the stairway; and I heard nothing of their approach. I looked up from my table, from my book, and saw them standing against the light of the door. Well as I came to know many of them, the sound of their voices, the clasp of their hands, surely they will some day brighten again out of the dull imperfection of acquaintance into that something visionary, radiant

in the light of Timbuctoo, which appeared before my eyes.

II

Life in Timbuctoo at that season was amazingly comfortable. During the middle of the day it was hot; between eleven and three the thermometer looked down on you from the nineties. But during these hours one did not go out unless one had to, avoiding the sun, the piercing weight of the sun, I might almost say. No; one had lunch about noon, and after that the delicious interim called the siesta. Flies were numerous and insistent, especially in the heat of the day; but my mosquito net was large enough to take my steamer chair under its wing, and I used to retire to that shelter with a book. Through some straight-laced action of my conscience, I had brought from Europe only books the reading of which might be judged by the best authorities as "worth while." So I drifted to sleep in the performance of a duty, which added to the delights of the siesta the luxury of misdoing. There was little noise from beneath my windows; everyone within range of a hundred miles was probably dozing as I was.

Later in the afternoon little Alfa would come round, and when Omar had returned from his midday hours off, Alfa and I would go for a walk, almost invariably down to the pool, where we had a wash and a swim. It was part of our sport for me to shout *"Caiman!"* and

for him thereupon to squeal and thrash the water and dart and dive, though we knew there was no crocodile there.

By the edge of the pool where we indulged thus ran the way into the desert west and northwest of Timbuctoo, and along this all day there passed nomads, afoot or mounted on donkeys or humped beeves, figures out of the Old Testament. Here the women brought their washing, and there were many voluminous colored robes spread over the thorn-bush hedges to dry during a bit of gossip or while the women splashed and rubbed one another's backs in the bath. Men came to bathe before saying their prayers. Later in the year, after the return of the great salt caravan with which most of the Arabs had left the city, these fascinating children of Ishmael brought down their camels here to drink. But it was a very large pool. There was no press about it, and the people came and went only in groups of two and three.

While we were there, the glories of the sunset would begin, and we would walk home over sands suffused with the color of topaz, of quinces, or pale-blue grapes, or even of mulberries, our own white clothes flushed even as the air and the sands and everything about us. Alfa often led me home through the villages of straw huts outside the city itself to introduce me to his relatives and his friends, who lived thus humbly and with many of whom I became acquainted.

During the first ten days of my stay the nights were

warm; but suddenly after that, consequent upon a change of the moon, as the natives predict, they grew cold with an incredible chill thermometers know nothing about. Often I had to labor shivering out of my blankets to put a heavy sweater on over my pajamas. Omar, who as soon as he had made acquaintances in the town slept out of the house, would return about half past six in the morning and come up to my room shrunken, almost pale with cold, his teeth chattering so that he could hardly talk. Then I, warm in my sweater, would laugh, he was so comic in his great misery, and look at the thermometer, which, quite indifferent to human suffering, registered 65. Once I think it was sympathetic enough to go down into the fifties. As a mechanism, my thermometer was probably accurate; it agreed with others in the town. But as I learned in the Sudan that distance is something other than a matter of miles or kilometers, and that time is not an affair of indicators turning on a dial, so I learned that cold is as cold feels and is not at all accountable to the susceptibility of mercury to contract or expand. There is something invigorating about cold in the north; but the cold here took the heart out of you. You lived in cramped misery till the sun rose high. Until that came to pass, you might stamp your feet or thrash your arms or run a mile and never get warm.

Nevertheless, in spite of the cold, I used to go down alone to the pool almost every morning for a swim before breakfast. How cold the sand was under my bare feet,

how chilled everyone I met. But I suffered the chills and discomforts for the delight of being abroad in the streets in the early morning. It was mostly women I saw, women who with the break of dawn take down their water jars to the pool to return with them filled on their heads, slowly, gracefully, like goddesses, earnestly, patiently on the first round of their heavy labors. At the pool, too, there were things to see in the clear gray light: the native canoes that had come up from the Niger under the moon, the men huddled round little fires on which the teakettle already steamed; the vivid green bales of grasses on the sand, brought from distant meadows; the black Faithful at their prayers, muffled in strange African stuffs; to say nothing of the drove of donkeys drinking without stirring a ripple on the steely surface of the water, or the ostrich that ran so fast from the barking little dog that it blurred itself. I used to go on this morning excursion clothed in a long black-and-white Moroccan jellaba, with the hood over my head and my towel across the lower part of my face in the manner of the veil so many desert men wear. So I fancied I might pass among these people a little less as a stranger, forgetting my feet were bare and that I was white even to my toes. And I think, still, that many took me for a fair-skinned Moor, for they looked on me with a penetrating gaze such as they would never have wasted on a mere white man. At any rate, in the early morning, when there were so few

abroad, almost everyone wished you good day, in the gentle, courteous formula of the land.

Day and night through these months the air was absolutely dry, and everything in your house dried out. Wet linen dried in half an hour or less; you needed almost a hammer to crack a loaf of bread a day old. A match consumed itself before you could light two cigarettes with it, and the cigarettes themselves burned rather than smoked. Towards the end of December the winds began to blow from the desert. There was no keeping the sand out; it sifted almost through the walls in fine dust, too fine, fortunately, to be gritty; and under a blazing sun Timbuctoo looked as if it were in the grip of a blizzard. The houses were blurred out of sight, the men blown in their walk, buffeted by the wind, their long robes streaming. But the winds were only riotous; they were not yet scorching as they become later, burning every growing plant to death in a few hours.

In the town were four or five big French trading companies, usually well stocked, in spite of what the Bamako merchants tell you, with a variety of things. But the cost of European wares was extremely high. Canned goods especially would make an appalling item in the monthly bill. While you depended on the stores for sugar, coffee, tea, together with soap, kerosene, matches, etc., you bought your victuals as much as possible in the native market. Omar went to market every morning immediately after breakfast. There was plenty of meat, mostly mutton or goat. Being freshly killed,

it was pretty tough, but excellent for soups and hashes and for stuffed tomatoes, a dish Omar excelled in. Sometimes he would bring home a liver or brains, and cook them to the palate of an epicure. Chickens averaged fifty centimes apiece, never more than seventy-five. Now and then some one would bring a duck or squabs to the house. All fowl were killed on the premises. Milk never lacked—goat's milk, sheep's, camel's, one never knew or cared to know which. Boiled and strained, it was excellent. There was nothing in that hot, iceless land but liquid butter to be had; but this, likewise boiled and strained, was very good indeed for cooking, and if it was strong, was no more so than the Parmesan cheese which goes so well with many dishes.

Somehow or other, there were always eggs. They were small—so were the hens—but you paid only a French sou for them, sometimes less. I was never served a stale one. Omar could make delicious custards. His failure to boil them to my taste, which favors about four minutes, was amusing. For the first essay, I gave him my watch, forgetting he could hardly tell time. Yet the eggs were perfectly boiled. The next time they were almost raw. He gave me his word, always a very solemn word, that he had boiled them four minutes. "Indeed, sir," he said, "I put them in boiling water and counted four slowly." Most blacks display little lack of self-confidence, and Omar had many a strut of his own; but he had no confidence in his cooking, and his cooking was often high art.

I left the planning and ordering of all meals to him, and I kept no tabs whatsoever on the larder. Every Monday I gave him twenty-five francs for the week's food, and at the end of the week he brought me a little book in which he had noted his expenditures. This I looked over, chiefly to help him with his arithmetic. He never exceeded the allowance and never fell far short of it. Perhaps had I kept closer watch over this branch of the household I could have saved some money, but this would have been irksome and, for the relatively short time I was to be there, hardly worth while. I have absolutely no reason to think that any of my provisions found their way to other boards than mine. Omar was naturally honest. The surest way to break down this virtue in him, or in any other native, would have been to regard him with suspicious surveillance.

One morning while he was at market I found two of his friends in my kitchen, heating milk over my fire. Undoubtedly it was their own milk and the fire was burning anyhow; but being short-tempered, I shooed them out. Later Omar came to me, his lip quivering, tears in his eyes. He said, "Never while I have been in your house has a thing been stolen from the kitchen." Carefully hiding my shame, I reminded him that it might be precisely because he was not in the kitchen that I had put his friends out of it; and that if his friends stole things, he it would be, none the less, who would be held to blame. I wish I had told him the truth, that I had driven those lads away entirely because I

was cross. Because of my hypocrisy, the affair rankled in his so young and so black breast.

I had a big jackknife and a silver pencil, which possessions caused me more fret and worry than anything else in Timbuctoo. How my black visitors and my Arab guests envied me those trifles! Well, I used to mislay them and could not find them for a while, and at once suspected the natives of Africa of having stolen them, which they never did and probably never thought of doing.

Mine was a policy of *laissez-aller,* I know well; and it may have been just a bit of luck that my boy was honest. Still, I know that the more you trust a black man or an Arab, the more surely will he not steal from you. It does no harm to show the black man that you trust him; he is not without self-esteem, and trust of any kind exalts him. I met a man in the colonies whose parents had lived in the colonies before him. When he went out on his own, his mother offered him but one piece of advice about the management of his household. "Give your boy your keys," she said.

But to go back to victuals. An unexpected delight in Timbuctoo was the plenty of green vegetables. Wherever the French go they bring delicious eatables from the soil. In the Sudan, which lies flat and sandy under a torrid sun and which is swept from April to October by blast-furnace winds, they none the less make green things grow for three or four months in the year. In Timbuctoo there were at the season of my stay young

onions, carrots, spinach, green beans, eggplant, turnips, tomatoes, salad, watercress.

The gardens lie on the western limit of the town, along the canal or the pool. They are entirely artificial. A chosen plot of sand is first divided into many small beds, each confined within borders of beaten earth. They might be so many Moslem graves, side by side and row on row. Manure from private stables or from army stables is mixed carefully and economically with the sand of each bed. It seems the next thing to preparing flower pots. Immediately after planting, the watering begins, and it never ceases till the hot winds close the season. From dawn till dark, black gardeners or their helpers are carrying water from the canal to the beds, pouring it in great, swashing canfuls within the retaining borders of the plots. The green sprouts shoot; the plants prosper. If you meet a Frenchman when his day's work is done, he is most likely on his way to his garden, whither he will take you, where he goes to delight in the swelling pods, to mark the next day's culling, to give a timely word to the gardener.

Though the natives have hardly taken green vegetables into their diet, they have learned to make and cultivate gardens; and a very elegant and accomplished black man, he who had accompanied me into the city, could supply me with vegetables during my stay. For a franc a day I could have what I wanted from his garden. The season was a little early; still, the salad was crisp; there were beans and carrots and onions.

Later the cabbage and cauliflower came in. Neither Omar nor I went to pick and choose in the garden, but each morning the proprietor sent round his gardener's assistant with a basketful. Thereby hangs a tale for later telling. In the market place were rice and yams, peanuts, and even little watermelons. So we lived well.

I need hardly say there was no drainage system in Timbuctoo. Slops and swill were merely thrown on the ground of the courtyard, whence they drained off through a hole in the wall into the street. It sounds unclean, indeed; but the sandy soil, the sun, the wind, make quicker absolution of the waste than ever the most elaborate system of sewers could do. In half an hour it was gone from sight. I have wandered day and night through the narrow lanes of the city, and never once did I smell an evil smell. Timbuctoo, as I have hinted, is an amazingly clean place. The black people are forever washing themselves and their clothes. The rags of the poor, perhaps, could stand no more washing; but these were no dirtier than they looked, were doubtless often cleaner; and the sun scorched them and the wind blew through them, and the body was clean underneath.

As for sanitary arrangements, on an hour's notice the native police would send men round to put everything in clean condition. I was greatly struck by the dispatch and the decency with which such necessary work was attended to. The black man is naturally modest and decent. When I first told a policeman that I wished cer-

tain things to be done, he replied: "I will bring the men round this afternoon, and after that as often as you like." Shortly after lunch, I heard a solemn pounding on the street door. Omar being off for the afternoon, I went down to open. There stood the policeman, with his red fez, and behind him two haughty Daggars, the lower half of their faces veiled, as is the custom of their race. Though they were prisoners, each carried his saber.

With the dreadful promptness of an undertaker, the policeman led them into the court. To me he said, "You will please go up to your room." There was something so impressive, so proud and aloof, about the two desert men, prisoners though they were, that I felt like offering them an apology; but they eyed me with such cold steadfast hate, as indeed they had every right to do, that I fell in with the policeman's recommendation without a word.

During the half hour which followed, not the faintest sound came up from the courtyard to my room. Then, appearing silently at my door, the policeman bade me come and inspect the results. In the brilliant sun the court lay smooth and empty. Everything had been put in order as by a miracle, as by those elves who come into a house at night to render it spick and span. But I could not forget the look in the eyes of those haughty Mohammedans, now silently departed, who were not elves, but fierce tribesmen. I gave all the gratuity into the hands of the black policeman. Of course, not a sou of it was given to the prisoners, who had come in

such bitterness and had been sent away out of my sight. Without any doubt, however, they furiously desired never to see me again.

Once a week the mail came, usually on Tuesday or Wednesday, and the mail went out a day or two after. During the months I was there the water was high enough in the Niger for the two steamboats to keep their schedule. In January it began to fall, the steamboats came late, and before I left the mail was carried in a scow poled by black men. Traveling day and night, they put hardly more time into a trip than the steamers put, and are on the whole more regular. There was no telephone in town, but there was telegraph connection with the outside world, at least when the wires had not been cut by raiders.

On the northeast corner of the city and on the southwest were barracks with several companies of black infantry and camel squadrons of blacks or Arabs, under a few white officers. So our days went on to the sound of bugles, singularly clear in that air and echoless. The blacks in the city knew all the calls and spaced their days by them. If these were not enough for you, you could set your watch by the shot of a rifle, fired every morning at ten o'clock, though ten o'clock by what time no one ever knew. Some of the black people had watches, too, and took an equal pride in them whether they worked or not. But there was no town clock. The great day was in three generous parts: the cool of the morning, visibly pale blue; the golden heat of midday;

and the returning freshness of the late afternoon, the violet shadows lengthening till, almost without evening, night came. So, accordingly, there was a time for getting up and a time for going to bed; twice or three times a day the town ate; for a delicious spell it dozed; and nobody rushed.

Were the sounds of the city, never loud but always clearly traced in the pure, echoless expanse, were even they but a definition of the light? You think of Timbuctoo as silent in its luminousness; yet your ears keep memories. There were the turtledoves and the daws in the early morning before sun-up. With the sunrise, two or three days a week, came the sounds of bugle practice faint yet clear from the other end of the city. I used to admire the "method" through which the band of novices were led in half an hour from detached single tones, through rhythmical patterns, to elaborate fanfares.

Still early in the morning, before breakfast, there floated in through the north windows a sound of strange singing, alternate solo and chorus of men, precise in pitch though as much shouted as sung. In the lilt of the tune there was something familiar; but so subtly so that I should never have said it was a tune I had once known and should sometime recall the name of; but that it was music in a system kindred with our own, for all it was wild and strange. It always brought me to the sill of my window, and Omar and I would go up on the rooftop the better to hear it. Omar had an

opinion: "That," he declared, "is the singing of the Touaregs at their morning gymnastics."

It rose, indeed, from that quarter of the city where these nomads lodged if they came in from the desert. The rhythm was surely that of men singing at brisk exercise. What was strange might well be an expression of the wild freedom of this unconquerable people. Finally, the Touaregs are white, a branch of the mysterious white Berber race whose origin is unknown, whose language is not related to other groups; and perhaps the something so indefinitely familiar in their music was the something that was "white," and not "black" or Semitic, in it.

One morning I followed the sound. It led me quite beyond the quarter where the Touaregs lodged, beyond the barracks on their dunes, out over the cold sands. What I came upon at last was not a group of white Touaregs, but a company of black *tirailleurs,* who, under the direction of a black sergeant, were now marching back and forth, now dancing in circles. Magnificent fellows, all of them, with their red fezes and their black and white banded shirts, throwing themselves into the exercise with a grace which is the negro's alone. My ear had not wholly misinformed me: there was the rhythm of men at vigorous exercise, and there was barbaric jubilance. But as for what was "white" in the music, brought thus near to it I recognized the tune and even the words. There on the edge of the desert in the cold fresh morning, these superb black men were roaring

with a lilt that never was white and an ebullient lustiness:

"Auprès de ma blonde
Qu'il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon
Auprès de ma blonde
Qu'il fait bon dormir."

Sometimes I heard the black children shrilling the hymn tune: "There Is a Happy Land, Far, Far Away," which the missionaries had taught them; but though their joyous little hearts nearly burst their throats, they could not make that tune go with quite the vigor the black soldiers imparted to theirs.

As the sun rose higher, you could hear the market place filling up slowly, laughter and chattering and now and then the clear, violent duet of a quarrel. At noon the many sounds would die away, to increase more suddenly after the siesta.

That lovely siesta was not without its soft accompaniment. In the dozy silence, the scuff of bare feet in the sands became audible. One heard below the window the muffled thwack of a stick on a donkey's haunches and the mutterings of the driver. Then there were raps on the door of the Arab shop across the way, and the soft but reiterant call of a man waiting to be let in: *Hamed, Hamed, salam alek.* Occasionally, though I still remembered my name was not Hamed, I would look down into the street, thinking some one might be

trying to rouse me, my door was so close to the Arab's. But it was always against the Arab's door he pressed his face, this Moor or black man with his reiterant, soft *Hamed, Hamed, salam alek.*

Often through the day, but clearest towards sunset time, the sound of a pounding was in the air, hollow and reverberant. This you might take for the beat of a tom-tom in the outskirts, but it was a sound full of homely meaning: the sound of the women pounding grain for the evening meal. Later came the call to prayer from the mosque, floating melancholy and clear over the low city; and in the brief twilight often the sound of gay, rhythmical handclapping with a bright laugh or two, which came from the children dancing happily at the end of the day.

At night there was a black watchman on some sort of duty in the deserted, star-lit market place. He would kindle a little fire, and sitting on the sand before it, would play a flute till late into the night. The music had the liquid flow of some birds' songs, even like the nightingale's. It was not gay, not plaintive, but impassioned, and as clear and isolated in the night as the stars themselves. A dog always lay on the sand beside him, and sometimes a straying black man or two would sit down for a while and keep the musician company, listening. After he had put aside his flute, there would be no more sound over Timbuctoo save now and then the sudden barking of dogs in response to the faint wail of a jackal in the desert.

VIEW EAST FROM MY ROOFTOP

I lived, then, not only in comfort, but almost in luxury, independent, free from restriction to any time-table, from rush, from noise. And I lived, appreciably, in space. My terrace was above most of the roofs of the town; my own rooftop was like a pinnacle, whence I could see the horizon in its round. I looked oftenest to the north, out over the Sahara. Across these sands, from sands beyond, men for whom the desert held neither mystery nor charm were to come bearing in towards my very rooftop, were to come even into my very house and refresh themselves there. I did not foresee that this was to happen. Indeed, I looked many weeks over the sand without seeing a dweller of the desert. Yet from the first I felt the influence of a spell that lay over the wide, featureless expanse and over the old city lost in its midst, where life had been slowly ebbing away; a spell I could not account for other than by its being in the nature of light and space and limitless sand.

Chapter III: People

I

CENTURIES AGO THERE was an extensive Black empire along the Niger, ranging from the territories of the Bambaras on the west, easterly and southerly even down into Dahomey. This was the empire of the Songhai race. Timbuctoo [1] was the metropolis, though Gao, eight or ten days farther down the river by canoe, was the capital. The people of this race were, and still are, tall and handsome; the men were fearless warriors and clever merchants. Though many tribes of it lived along the river as fishers and boatmen, it was on the whole a race of city people. They call their language, even to-day, the "town language."

In the sixteenth century the Moroccans came down from the north across the Sahara and, after several attempts, conquered Timbuctoo. The story is recorded

[1] Though the city is now some five miles north of the Niger, it may have been originally, if not on the shore of the great river, at any rate on one of its bays. An ancient native name for the open market place is "the place of the hippopotamus". The dried bed of a tributary to the main stream is clearly traceable from Arrouan, at least eight days by caravan north of Timbuctoo. The Berber word, Arrouan, means head of the pasture lands.

in Arabic histories of how the Songhai, who were without firearms, massed thousands of head of cattle for the great contest and drove them against the invaders, and of how the stupid cattle turned tail in a stampede and crushed and routed the black men they had been driven forth to protect.

Under the Moroccans, Timbuctoo became a trading center of wide influence, whither came caravans, even from Cairo, with Eastern things to exchange for gold and ivory, brought up from the south, for hides and wool, for black slaves, and for salt, which is still mined in the desert round Taoudeni, about three weeks by camel north from Timbuctoo. But as the power of the Moroccan empire declined, the Arab merchants gradually withdrew from Timbuctoo and from Gao. The black natives lay at the mercy of plundering desert tribes and of the princely Touaregs, always on the hunt for slaves. In those times, the rich black man lived in a hovel like the poor. A house in keeping with his fortune would too promptly bring destruction upon itself at the hands of raiders forever wheeling about the city in the surrounding desert. Caravan routes across the desert became extremely precarious. The few Arab merchants who kept up their business in the city were continually harassed. Only the slave trade and the salt trade survived. Little by little the widespread city shrank and dwindled; and the houses which crumbled or collapsed under the rains of one season

were by those of the next dissolved and became dust and were blown quite away.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the French occupied the city. It is a curious tale, in which the stampede of cattle again plays its part. Young Colonel Bonnier was sent out from France for the conquest of Timbuctoo, and promised his bride to bring back to her the keys of the famous old city. Meanwhile, a young lieutenant of the French navy had come down the Niger to Kabara in an armed boat. He went north alone to Timbuctoo and went into the city and took possession of it, finding no gates and no keys, but only black people who received him honorably. An ensign, whom he had left behind on the boat, likewise found the lure of the almost mythical city too strong to resist, and he set out alone to make his way there. But a band of Touaregs fell upon him and killed him in a place midway between Kabara and Timbuctoo, which the Touaregs call the Place of Silence.

In the course of time Bonnier arrived and found the lieutenant peacefully established in Timbuctoo and the city formally occupied for the French, and nothing for him to do but avenge on the Touaregs the death of the ensign. So, with a column of a hundred men or more, he set out to the west towards Gundam, and some miles from Timbuctoo engaged a band of three or four hundred Touaregs, put them to rout, and drove their herds into the inclosure of his camp. In the middle of the night the Touaregs returned silently about

the camp and called to their cattle. These, responsive to the voices of their nomad masters calling them out from a strange place, stampeded; and in the confusion the Touaregs swept into the camp and with lance and saber massacred the whole column, with its officer, before they could even seize their guns.

Whatever judgment one may reserve upon the European and American civilization in general and, in particular, on its fashion of dispossessing other peoples, one must grant that the French occupation has brought security to the harassed natives of Timbuctoo and of the wide desert regions controlled from there. It is my own opinion that in so far as the French have won the co-operation of the natives, they have done so less by the superimposing of their own ideas, which is an affair of absolutism, than by their quick understanding of, and sympathy with, the native. Yet the only opinion worth listening to is that which in such affairs we are least likely to hear—*i.e.,* that of the natives themselves.

However it may be, Timbuctoo is at peace. In the city of some eight or ten thousand there is but a handful of French. There are scarcely more sedentary Arabs, though other Arabs come and go. There are a few Berbers of the Daggar caste. But the city must be ninety-eight per cent African; that is, black; and of the black population the overwhelming majority is of the original Songhai stock.

After centuries of domination by Arabs and Touaregs, the natural racial character of these city people

must have been greatly modified. They learned, before ever the Europeans appeared, to ape the master in the desperate hope of being able to pass as less the mere man. Moreover, being disposed by nature to commerce and civil life, they are the more sensitive and the more susceptible to outer manners and customs, with the result that, unlike the Peulhs, inveterately nomad, and the Bambaras, tillers of the soil, whose striking racial dignity is one with their racial life, the Songhai of Timbuctoo and of Gao have acquired a polish, or, if you will, a veneer, just as we have, which more or less hides the original grain. You sometimes wonder, now that the Europeans are there, if some of the petty manifestations of this are irritating because they are fairly accurate imitations of ourselves. You often wonder what there may be of solid beneath the superficial fluidity. Yet, that the stock is a strong and admirable one you learn as you go along the Niger among tribes of it which have kept out of the cities, especially among the Jurmas, farther down, who safeguard your every step and many of whom you feel would give their lives for the stranger guest in their keeping.

There is certainly no trace of "savage" life in Timbuctoo. The Songhai are anything but a primitive people. There are two mosques as old as the most venerable European cathedrals; there is an ancient university; there is a tradition; there are young men who read and write literary Arabic, others who read and write French and profess it in the schools. Above all, there is a

notable elegance of manner. This, protected by a genuine though unorthodox Mohammedanism, still resists, like the more sterling dignity of the Peulhs and the Bambaras, many influences from the north.

A day or two after my arrival, while still I felt embarrassed in the crowd of the market place, as I stood wondering how I could buy a few of the small melons a black woman had put for sale before her on the sand, a beautifully dressed young black man came up and asked in perfect French if he could be of service to me. When he learned what I wanted, he bade me stand aside, so that he could buy the melons as for himself at the native price. At the end of the bargaining he called me forward and, much to the surprise of the woman, who looked quite as if she had been cheated, I paid for the melons. There being at that moment no youngster at hand, I delighted in picking up the melons and starting off with them myself. But this distressed my new friend. He felt that I should not make such a show of myself. He hinted that he would not do so. Yet I insisted. Whereupon he himself took the melons and accompanied me to my house. It was a little thing. So was his calling that evening, to make sure that I was comfortably installed. So perhaps was his writing me his name in clearest script, though skeptics might say he did this chiefly to show me he could write. Yet his serene courtesy made a lasting impression, and gave me at once to know that I was among a friendly people of many sensibilities.

The language of the Songhai remains a spoken one, for they never devised an alphabet; and, though quite distinct, presents, I was told, the typical characteristics of African tongues, whatever they may be. Simple in construction and limited in vocabulary, it nevertheless permits apt expression and even eloquence; and the folklore is full of natural wisdom and poetry. The great mass is illiterate, yet a surprising number speak more than one language. The black storekeepers may speak four or five; the interpreters, seven or eight. One is inclined to assume that it is somehow easy for a member of one African race to pick up the languages of others. As a matter of fact, however, such tongues as the Toucouleur, the Bambara, and the Songhai are not at all related to one another; and when you stop to consider that many ordinary black men can speak fluently not only in each, but equally fluently and sometimes correctly in Arabic and French and even the Berber Tamashek, which is the despair of trained European linguists, you begin to wonder if these Africans have not some special gift for languages. (Or is it that they learn languages naturally, and not through the blighting mechanics of grammar?) My boy Omar spoke his own language, Toucouleur, and Bambara equally well. His French was fluent and precise. And in the two months we were in Timbuctoo together he learned enough of the native Songhai to get along with, which is just about one hundred per cent more than I could do. On the whole, there were more of the Songhai who

spoke Arabic than who spoke French; but the younger men were coming on in French, and French would carry you along pretty easily.

My impressions of the native music were that it had been strongly influenced by the Arabs. This was certainly true of the costumes. The well-dressed native man wears baggy pantaloons, a long shirt, and, over both, one or two long full robes, usually white, sometimes blue. This "boubou" is far more voluminous than the ordinary Moroccan jellaba. Yards and yards of material go into the width of the sleeves alone. These hang full and graceful in folds from the shoulder, but a man must hold his arms spread for you to realize how much cloth has gone into the garment. The Arabs are master weavers and make beautiful cloths of silk or wool or cotton. The Africans, even in the Sudan where nights are so cold, seem to use wool only for blankets, and make their cloth stuffs entirely out of cotton. Of this they weave only a coarse fabric in strips not more than three or four inches wide, which they can and do sew together into tough, heavy cloth that wears for years. But the prosperous native now prefers European cottons, in spite of the relatively high price he must pay for them, even for the generally inferior grade that is at all within his means. Robes of these stuffs, which are often slazy as cheesecloth after the sizing has been washed out of them, are ornamented with white embroidery in geometrical designs, circles, and triangles, exceedingly beautiful work,

like lace. At least two of the native tailors had sewing machines, but many of the robes are still sewn by hand with the finest stitching.

Round his shorn head the native winds a turban, white, or orange, or deep blue; and on his feet wears the open sandals of the town or the bright yellow Moroccan "mules." Often there hang from his shapely dark neck a few little charm cases of beautifully tooled leather, attached to a fine leather cord. He wears rings only on his hands, and these, together perhaps with a bracelet or two, are his only ornaments. Smooth of skin, black or very dark brown of color, with large dark eyes and perfect teeth, with his erect carriage and his free, swift, graceful stride, his flowing robes, often spotless, the well-dressed Songhai of Timbuctoo is always a fine and often a beautiful sight to see.

Instead of pantaloons, the women wear a long piece of colored cloth, the more flowery the better, which they wind tightly about the body above the waist, not fastening it otherwise than by tucking in an end, and which, binding the hips tightly, hangs at least to the knees and sometimes to the ankles. When they are at work, they wear nothing but this, all the upper part of the body being bare. A woman with a baby, no matter how tiny, carries it with its legs astride her back, supported in a long band of cloth knotted under her breasts. She carries it so always, even while she is washing clothes; and I never saw one fall. The little thing's head lolls over the edge of the band or falls forward against its

mother's black back; but it is quite secure and evidently not uncomfortable.

Dressed up, a woman may wear two or three of these incipient skirts of various colors; one or two tunics of European stuff, with relatively short sleeves. She will knot gay handkerchiefs about her head and hang her neck with beads. If she has anklets or bracelets, she generally wears them all the time. The rich women wear embroidered slippers and enormous anklets. There are many kinds of bracelets, worn near the wrist or on the upper arm; the commonest are beaded leather or clumsy and very little worked metal, rarely silver and almost never gold, which must be hollow and consequently lighter, fortunately, than they look. There are anklets and even toe rings of the same massive appearance. I did not see many pendant earrings, but often many little rings are set close together round the edges of the ear.

Kinky as their hair is, they take pains endlessly to braid it in many fine plaits, with which are woven strands of bright ribbons or strings of beads. Several plaits are sometimes knotted round a ring of ivory or of brass. They anoint themselves with "karity" butter, which is not pleasant to smell but which makes their skins smooth as satin. Now and again you will see a woman in rich flowing stuffs; but in general their costume is less graceful than that of the men. Not so their bodies: the set of their heads, their shoulders, their arms are in beautiful proportion. They are tall; their legs, even to ankles and

toes, are shapely; and no human being can walk with more grace and dignity than some of these black women, most of them, in fact, who, naked but for the bolt of cloth wound tightly round their hips and thighs, come up from the wells with the heavy water jar on their heads.

Among the men are merchants, tailors, cobblers, artisans of one sort or another—though except in sewing I saw no handicraft of such fine workmanship as one sees among some other African races—butchers, and fishermen, who go down to the Niger in season. There are shepherds even about Timbuctoo, whose flocks of goats get a living from the thorn shrubs; and many more along the river, along the shores of which, as the water recedes, grasses grow in abundance. The staple diet is rice and guinea corn (*mil*), but these are in the main imported from Mopti up the river.

Women do most of the finer weaving and some dyeing; and it is they, I was told, who weave and market the straw mats and baskets of one sort or another. You see many women vending in the market place, too—rice, corn, butter, yams, charcoal, and condiments. It is they who sell such pottery as there is. It may be an absurd system of classification, but it seemed in general true that in the market place the women sold such things as could be displayed on the sand, either in calabashes or on mats or on the sand itself; and you found the women always sitting on the sand by their wares, while

the men sold cloth stuffs, rugs, jewelry (of the cheapest ten-cent kind), and leather goods from booths.

II

Besides the true natives of the city, there are blacks of other races. Many of these are still held in some sort of slavery to the Arabs or Touaregs of the surrounding region, and are designated by the natives as *captifs*. More, encouraged by the French administration, which has of course forbidden slave trade, have achieved their freedom.

Alfa and I, one moonlit night, on a walk among some of the straw huts outside the city proper, came upon a group of people still at work. There was an old woman in rags, with two stalwart young men and a young woman, whose dress and ornaments were flashy in the moonlight. All were engaged in unloading bales from a donkey and carrying them into the compound, within which the last of a charcoal fire glowed dimly red. Usually, unless there was a wedding party dancing and singing its way about to the flickering of torches, Timbuctoo was still at night. Those who were not withdrawn into their houses lay in the shadow of the walls, smoking and talking in low voices. So it was that anyone afoot in the narrow streets by night seemed by virtue of his movement alone, which was always silent over the soft sand and always swift, invested with mystery. So by

the mere fact of their being silently at work in the moonlight, these people stirred some sense of mystery.

We stopped to watch them awhile, and the mystery was dissipated. The donkey was a white donkey in the moonlight, and the bales were sacks of charcoal, which these people had burned out among the thorn shrubs away from the city; and the black people themselves, one and all, were friendly and quite humanly grateful for the cigarettes we gave them. We laughed in trying to persuade the old woman to smoke hers; and in the end she would not do so, but removed the tobacco from the paper to have a real smoke of it in her pipe. The friendly encounter had such a charm for me that before going on I gave these people a standing order for charcoal, which they agreed to bring in to the house. I had forgotten the old woman in town and her promise that I should never lack for fuel while I lived in Timbuctoo. When, on the way home, I suddenly remembered her, I confessed to Alfa that I felt like a traitor. He snickered, and, surprised at my stupidity, told me that the old woman we had just met was none other than she who had brought the first sack of charcoal to the house.

I gathered that the two young men, one of them her son, the other the husband of her daughter, the young woman, cut the wood and charred it out among the thickets and thorn shrubs; that they worked together at bringing it in; and that she herself had the selling of the charcoal in the market.

Whenever she came to the house, we tried to gossip; but she knew not a word of French, and I none of Songhai; and I could not understand her rapid Arabic. I appealed to Omar to interpret, and he tried her in Bambara, but even of this language, so generally useful, she knew nothing. We were apparently balked.

To my great surprise, then, one morning I found her and Omar in a lively conversation.

"How's this," I asked him, "you two chattering so, though she does not know Bambara or French, and you do not know Songhai or Arabic?"

"She speaks Toucouleur, my own language!" he cried.

She was actually of his own race, which, barring a few isolated groups, belongs properly in the Senegal country many hundreds of miles to the west. She had, as she now told us, been taken in slavery by the Arabs, so very long ago that she could hardly remember her father or her mother, or anything of her home or of her native land. From that distant childhood there had remained to her only something of the tongue she had first learned, which had been preserved by her meeting from time to time some one of her race, like my boy, who chanced to speak to her in it.

All her life she had worked hard for masters, who had not been ruthless. She had married in slavery; and little by little through the years had put aside enough money eventually to buy her freedom and that

of her already grown son and daughter. So it had been with her, and so must have been with countless others.

I saw many younger than she who were still in "captivity." The majority of these the natives called Bellas, till I took them to be of a Bella race. Though I was told later that the term Bella does not designate a race, but properly any blacks enslaved to Touaregs (or Arabs) of the region, the Bellas were none the less sharply differentiated from the Songhai and Bambara types. They had a peculiar coiffure, shaving most of their heads, but leaving a band of hair growing from front to back over the crown, which they never cut but braided in ever-lengthening plaits that, full of dust and straw, dangled in a clump over the nape, sometimes as low as their shoulders. In sharp distinction from other black races, they had an aversion to washing themselves. They were, frankly, a dirty people. Then, still unlike most black people, they were not friendly, at any rate not sociably inclined toward strangers. They passed you in the street or outside the town with gaze fixed straight ahead, never looking at you; and when you greeted them, if they responded at all, did so perfunctorily and without smiling, hastening on their way. But above all, they were the workers. They were always at work. You felt they might have come great distances on foot, that they were untirable. Though there was, on the eastern confines of the city, a group of straw huts which we used to call the Bella village, where doubtless a few families were settled, for the most part the Bellas seemed disag-

IN THE STREETS

gregated. They came and went in small groups, whose courses, inexplicable to us, were probably prescribed by their nomad masters encamped at some remote spot in the desert. If, towards sunset time, you were wandering by the pool, you would sometimes come upon three or four of them among the dunes, evidently just arrived from somewhere, limbering their muscles, their sacks thrown on the sand, their hobbled donkeys near by. The little supper fire might be already burning. Often they would be smiling and laughing, but at sight of you they would fall silent. From any roof in Timbuctoo at night you would see isolated fires twinkling in the desert, small and clear as stars through that air in which no moisture ever made a haze. These shone from the camping places of Bellas.

Once I came upon a group within the city in the act of moving from a broken-down mud house where appearances indicated they had been staying some time. Before the door stood two mighty humped oxen the spread of whose horns nearly spanned the narrow street. These, together with a donkey or two, were already laden with household implements and small sacks of provisions, including a goatskin of water. A lad was astride of one of the oxen, holding two slender steel lances, the tips of which glittered in the sun. Astride the other was a woman, still young, with a baby at her breast. The man, dressed in dark blue robes, dusty and gritty, with the lower half of his face veiled against the sands and winds of the desert, holding, like the lad, two

glittering lances, gave a last look around and then got up on the ox behind the woman. The clumsy beasts were prodded to action, and with their vast horns swinging low, started down the street, the donkeys following impassively at the mercy of a wholly naked youngster with a stick longer than he was tall. Not unlike this, perhaps, Mary and Joseph went down into Egypt.

I followed them a little way out of the city and saw them turn northeast into the desert, amid the sands of which they were soon no more than moving specks. But specks that moved somewhere, and that knew, moreover, whither they were moving without compass and without maps off into that trackless wilderness of sand.

III

The Arabs, Berbers, and Moors, some of whom are settled in the city, many of whom come to it on occasion, are sharply defined from the blacks in every way. These races are white as our own; and the Arabs keep the tradition of a civilization in some ways finer than ours. All may be of swarthy complexion, with dark hair and eyes; but their noses are high and arched, their lips thin. It is well to remember that the Berbers differ from the Arabs even more than the Slavs from the western Europeans, and that in both you have to do with a highly sensitive and peculiar temperament.

As for the Arabs settled in the city, they are either landholders or merchants, sometimes both. The mer-

chants maintain shops smaller than the French stores and deal with members of the desert tribes of Arabs and the Berbers who come in to town for cloth, tea, sugar, salt, and other provisions. They have likewise considerable wholesale interests in salt and wool. Though there is no such luxury in Timbuctoo as you find in the great Arabic cities of northern Africa, these men are educated and polished, and as far as commerce is concerned keep in close touch with European affairs.

With the return of the salt caravan comes an influx of Arabs from the desert. These men are hardly touched by European civilization. For a while they lodge in the northern quarter of the city. At night you will find them seated in rings on the sandy stretches outside the city limits, telling stories, sometimes chanting together in praise of Allah under the stars. They seemed rather shy than distrustful, and responded instantly to a greeting.

The Berbers, on the other hand, especially the Touaregs, who are the Berber lords, were haughty beyond words. Few came to town, except on some special occasion, such as a visit of the Governor-General or a great market week. Then you might see them mounted on camels or horses hung with sumptuous leather fringe work. If they deigned to look down on you, it was with a stare in which fearless hostility and fearless curiosity seemed at a hair-trigger balance. Since they swathe their heads in a turban and veil the lower part of their faces, all you see of them is their eyes, which

are the most remarkable, in both color and setting, I have ever seen. At one instant you would say them jet black, only at the next to see them full of a golden gleam; and they are big and set wide apart under noble brows, deep and fringed with thick lashes.

One day, as I was walking a little outside the city with a chance visitor, we saw a small band of people mounted on camels and horses coming in from the desert. They were not very far off and seemed likely to cross our path before we should come up with them; so, though we waved a greeting, which one of them returned, we did not hurry to intercept them. To our surprise, they halted in our way and waited for us to come up, which we did, now, with a bit of trepidation, for we saw they were Touaregs, and we had heard that Touaregs are sudden in their antipathies and swift to strike. We had been perhaps too presumptuous.

When we came to them, we saw only their eyes looking down, in which there was not the faintest expression of feeling. I greeted them in French. Not a sound or a movement in the group round us, not a waver in the stare of the seven pairs of eyes. I greeted them in Arabic. The same perfect immobility, the same transfixing regard. Then I stood close to the camel of him who was apparently the chief and raised my hand, and he freed his hand from his robe and, reaching down, though without bending, clasped mine. The other six likewise freed one hand. Then, when, in utter silence, we had shaken the hand of each, they moved on. We

did not hear a word even to the animals nor see a movement to direct them; and though we looked a long while after, not a man of them turned. Such was my only true meeting with Touaregs.

In this mysterious race, white as we are and without trace of the Semite, especially in the branch of it which inhabits the southeastern Sahara, a feudal class system still prevails. The Daggars, of the same racial stock as the Touaregs, are in the relation to them of vassals to princes. There were not a few Daggars in Timbuctoo. It was a Daggar who brought me milk in the morning.

He was poor, dressed in worn blue robes so flimsy the light showed through them, and he shivered in the early morning cold. I used to get up early for the purpose of having a fire going in one of the kitchen braziers, so that this shepherd might warm himself. When he arrived, shivering and blowing on his fingers, and saw me fanning the coals, he would come swiftly and squat before the brazier with me and hold his thin hands out to the warmth. If the fire did not burn well, he would take off one of his sandals and fan it more effectively than ever I could, and with slender fingers would rearrange each bit of charcoal separately, and blow, and say, Allah be praised.

Almost always we had a cigarette together, while, in little more than whispers, we conferred over the amount I owed him for milk. He would put off all settlement, till I lost count and gave him a lump sum, which he accepted most gratefully, but invariably, I

found, as a gift and not at all as payment for the milk. This had to be arranged for later through courteous formulas without end and, I devoutly trust, at the cost to me of a franc or two beyond the strict tally.

He told me his wife was sick of a cold, and, finding me not unsympathetic, informed me that the only cure for a cold was plenty of hot tea, with lots of sugar in it. So I contributed to the cure of his wife. Later he himself fell sick likewise. Then it was the wife, still beautiful, and his daughter, in the full perfection of a young girl's beauty, who would come with the milk, cold and shivering as the father. They looked at me with some distrust, for the women of this stock are by no means of *mœurs faciles;* but the fire brought them into the kitchen, where the mother's eyes quickly detected many a little thing to beg. She would weep as she told me what I by now knew, that the only cure for a cold was plenty of hot tea with lots of sugar in it. So I helped get the husband well. When he was recovered he brought me the hind quarter of a gazelle he had shot in the desert. Omar scoffed at this, saying he had never seen anything to look like it save the hind leg of a sheep. But Omar may have wanted it for his own friends. Where they lived, or where they led their small flock of sheep and goats to feed, these simple people, whose manners were so fine, I never knew.

One often encountered in Timbuctoo a group of Moors (*Maures*)—that is, of men from the Mauretanian races, not Moroccans. The Mauretanians are of

Berber stock, like the Touaregs, but have been greatly modified by the Arabs, who conquered them centuries ago and from whom they accepted religion and language and many customs. Though the women are often of dazzling beauty, the men have not the noble features nor the noble carriage of either the Touaregs or the Arabs. Over their small, round faces tumbles a mop of long, curly, unkempt hair. They wear scanty tunics of cheap cotton, the blue dye of which not only smirches their necks and their arms and even their faces, so that you would think them strange blue men, but shrouds them in an almost visible odor. They do not wash.

I knew an Arab who married a Mauresque girl, beautiful as perhaps only these girls can be. Though he was deeply smitten with her charms, he would have had her changed in one particular. He would have had her bathe. But this he could not persuade her to do. Never had she done so, and the thought of washing herself in water seemed to fill her with terror. At last, determined to vanquish her phobia, he ordered his slaves to take her and put her by force into the bath. Then she fought like a tigress, and breaking from the slaves, ran and threw herself at the feet of her lord and master. "Do anything with me you will," she cried; "strip me before the multitude, thrash me, but do not make me take a bath." Being of a kind heart, rather than frighten her out of her wits, he divorced her.

The life of these people in their own vast land of swamp and desert is not without grandeur. There have

been great leaders among them, holy men of wide influence; there are chiefs rich in cattle; there is a tradition of learning, and there are libraries of priceless Arabic manuscripts. They do beautiful work in leather, half Berber, half Arabic in design, richly colored. But those one meets wandering out of their own country, along the upper Senegal and down the Niger at least as far as Timbuctoo, are not impressive. They drift along in bands of three or four, apparently engaged in small trading in live stock.

A day or so after my arrival in Timbuctoo, to my joy I ran upon the four Moors who had come to my cabin on the *Bonnier*. Sidi Mohammed's finger was in such a bad state that I dragged him to Monsieur Abd El-Kadir, whom I begged to persuade him, in stronger Arabic than I was capable of, to go at once to the doctor in the dispensary—admirably equipped, by the way.

On the next day they came round to call, all four of them, and Sidi Mohammed assured me he had been to see the Christian doctor; but as the finger was swollen and stiffened and, according to the native science, smeared with dung, which had caked on it, I must take the will for the deed.

Thereafter, they came almost every day. Sidi Mohammed always presided over our congregation, sitting on a chair at the table; for he had some reputation among them as a marabout, or holy man, which rested partly, I suppose, on the fact that he could read and

write Arabic, and perhaps more on a superior craftiness. The meeting began with his demanding a piece of paper and my Eversharp pencil, with which he would then write: first, all their names and mine in Arabic characters; later, a verse from the Koran and the invariable formula, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." Bent upon teaching me his language, he would set me to copying these, watching me carefully. But I never could copy much. The interest of the others in my Eversharp would grow too keen; they would take it from my hand and screw the lead out. It meant nothing to them that they could not push the lead back again and that when anyone tried to write, it snapped off. So, to save the leads, I used to switch their attention to the Corona, which they would not touch themselves, much as it fascinated them, but upon which I must write their names in Roman characters, together, of course, with my own. Each kept a list of the names so written: Sidi Mohammed, Abdullahi, Beida, and Moulay-Ali.

After a while they would ask me to explain the use of everything in the room. I had nailed to the wall several yards of the cheap blue cotton out of which they make their clothes. This was to protect my own from the dust; and as such a use of the material seemed to them utterly wasteful, they never failed to ask me for it. On my part, I never failed to promise to give it them when I should leave Timbuctoo; and we made

an agreement which provided for their leaving before me.

Sidi Mohammed was always spokesman for the group. On the occasion of their second visit he said: "We have friends coming to-day to drink tea with us, and we have no charcoal to make a fire. Give us some of yours."

So we went down into the court together, and they took charcoal from my heap, which they knotted in corners of their blue tunics and went away, each with a goodly amount and happy. When they came the next time other friends were due, and it was sugar and tea that lacked. With the sugar and tea I gave them, they went as far as the outer door; but on the threshold Sidi Mohammed suddenly recalled that charcoal was again likewise lacking. So we all turned back to the charcoal pile.

This angered Omar. He had scolded me the first time; now he laughed maliciously and promptly transferred all the charcoal from the open court to the hiding of his kitchen. But on the very next day came the Moors, and after the routine of the visit was over, Sidi Mohammed took from his wallet several coins and laid them on the table in payment for the charcoal and the tea and sugar.

"Omar," I said triumphantly after they had gone, "they have paid me for all they took."

He looked at me scornfully. Nothing can describe

the impudence of an Omar outraged either by me or on my behalf.

"Did you take their money?" he asked. Very much crestfallen, I admitted that I had refused it.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "They knew you would."

Poor Moulay-Ali! When next they came, his face was long and his voice broken. Yes; he was sick, and I must cure him. The others groaned in chorus; and Moulay-Ali lifted his tunic and showed me his back, a handsome, muscular back. I could see nothing wrong with it. They urged me to put a hand on it, which I did and could feel nothing wrong with it. But he still whimpered, so I prepared him a dose of salts, a stiff one. He drank it without a grimace and then kissed my hand. Promptly all the others demanded some of the medicine I had given Moulay-Ali; but I would do them no such violence as I suspected I had done that unfortunate, and they had to be content with a quinine pill apiece. Poor Moulay-Ali! he dodged me henceforth in the market place and he never came to the house again except on the morning of his departure from Timbuctoo.

Once the others came into the store where I was buying something and stood silently beside me at the counter. How silent these people can be, and how motionless! When I was done with my business, Sidi Mohammed spoke rapidly in Arabic with the black man behind the counter.

The black man translated: "Sidi Mohammed wishes

to buy that spoon in the case. It costs one franc twenty, and he has no money. Will you lend him one franc twenty?" I answered in French, which the Moors could not understand: "Tell them I believe they wish me to give them the money, not lend it, and that I will give it them." But the black man replied quickly: "When the Moor asks to borrow money, he means to borrow it; and when he borrows it, he pays it back." Feeling reproved, I put the money in Sidi Mohammed's hand, who wasted no words in thanks but, wishing me the peace of God, reached for the spoon.

Sure enough, early the next morning Sidi Mohammed came with Abdullahi to the house, and, counting out the one franc twenty, put the money on the table and soberly bade me take it. I did so; I could not, as a gentleman, do otherwise.

They were returning to Bamako by land with a drove of donkeys. Dirty and unkempt, they came to bid me good-by. For the last time in my presence Sidi Mohammed wrote, "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate"; and he tore off the little script to give it me as a talisman. I tapped their names once more on the Corona. They were downcast by my refusing to give them, then and there, the blue cloth nailed to the wall; but I stood on the agreement. So, after they had written the name of the man with whom I should leave it on my own departure, and had made me repeat it several times, one by one they solemnly embraced me and went away. When, months later and

THE FOUR MOORS

hundreds of miles from Timbuctoo, I chanced upon them again, I was proud to be able to tell Sidi Mohammed that the blue cloth had been delivered into Hassan's keeping, even according to our agreement.

IV

Such, then, in general were the people among whom I dwelt and with whom, through the business of living or the luck of mutual friendliness, I soon established contact. Though I could not change my color, which set me apart from them, or my race, which assured me, whether I would or no, a position; and though I could not speak their languages, my association with many of them was intimate. On their part, it was predominantly curiosity which brought them to my house; on mine, I was not only disposed to receive them, but free to do so without reservation. What one gets out of a sojourn in a strange land is so greatly the result of the point of view one takes into it, or the attitude one may or must assume therein, that my disposition and my freedom in Timbuctoo require a word of explanation.

White men in Africa belong to one of three classes. First, there are the administrators, with whom may be grouped the military. They are now concerned not so much with setting up the white man's rule, which is a matter of battle easily tried, as with setting up his law, a question of far more subtle conquest. They can, and do, assure the native a verdict in conformity

with this law; but though many natives learn to profit by the law in the development of the country, the vast majority are less perspicacious. They cannot see the law, either round it or through it; and must be therefore brought blindly to respect it. Thus the administrators find themselves obliged, *ex officio,* to make themselves respected and to uphold a supremacy which the native may not approach near enough to question.

In the second class belong the exploiters of the new country, representatives of big commercial interests at home, or small traders. For the fruition of their schemes they are wholly dependent on native labor; for tropical Africa is not, and never can be, a white man's land. They must make the native work. They cannot kill him off as we killed the Indian, whom we had no use for and who was in our way. It is the business men, therefore, who most implacably accuse the African of laziness. They cannot drive or teach or persuade or cajole him to regard time as money or to recognize usury as the chief end and aim of man. Eventually they have recourse to a disgusted brutality, which, though it goes the steam engine one better in the waste of energy, does get something done. Friendly relations between them and the natives are not profitably established.

Finally, there is the small class of missionaries and educators. At the present time the missionaries are almost exclusively Christian. Any escape from their assumption of moral superiority is denied them, for they must regard doubt of what they have come to preach as

in its very self a sin. One finds them gentle and kind, often strong and fearless, doing their utmost to make the Berber, the Arab, the Moor, the Negro, believe that he is born in a state of sin, and that he can achieve redemption solely through the articles of one or another Christian creed. As for the school-teachers, they are there because they know more than the native of things the knowledge of which is supposed to exalt mankind, such as reading and writing and history—from the point of view of Christian nations.

Though there are some small groups which stand apart, notably the physicians, and though in every class there are individuals outstanding by virtue of their justice and their fairness, their power of genuine affection, the interesting point to note is that administrators, business men, missionaries, all have no choice, but must maintain a position of superiority to the native, in one way or another, and must loyally and unswervingly insist upon his recognizing it.

Human self-importance is a subtle thing. Far be it from me to deny that I feel myself superior to most white men. In such countless numbers they feel themselves superior to one another and to me, that I need accuse myself of no freakishness. But I did not feel that as a white man I was superior to a black, either by my color or by the training which had shaped me to conformity with conventions different from his; nor was I so confident of the loftiness of the Christian civilization as to find all others degraded by compari-

son. And having in coming to Timbuctoo no purpose, I was in no position which bound me to insist upon lowliness or subservience of any kind in those among whom I lived. On the contrary, in so far as my station was concerned, or my disposition, nothing stood in the way of my acknowledging openly before them that they and theirs might well be not inferior, but superior to me and mine. This was an extraordinary freedom. Perhaps it was Freedom, for which so many of us have competed.

Chapter IV: Baba the Thief

I

ON THE THIRD OR FOURTH night of my stay in Timbuctoo several black men came to call. It was just after supper. In the yellowish light of the lantern on the table, with the straw mats on the floor and a native blanket or two on the back of a chair, the room looked not unattractive. First to arrive were two big fellows. The foremost, in a magnificent white boubou and an orange turban, greeted me cheerily from the doorway and, leaving his sandals at the threshold, swept into the room. It was the friendly man who had turned back from his promenade to accompany me to Timbuctoo, and who was later to supply me with vegetables. I now learned that his name was Mahmadou Siy, and that he was an official interpreter.

"I had a talk with your boy downstairs," he said. "Omar is a good boy, of my own race. For I am not a Songhai, though I speak the language perfectly, but a Toucouleur. My father was the intimate friend of many French generals. I myself know General Gouraud well. He did not wish me to leave his service.

Your house is pleasant, and I am glad to know you have a good boy."

There was, perhaps, a note of patronage in the commendation of my house and my boy. But why resent it? Siy meant above all to be friendly and reassuring.

He presented his companion, who had remained standing in the doorway, as a young holy man, like myself a stranger in the town, who was lodged with him for the time being. Alimamy, this young marabout, was in a dark-blue robe, bareheaded, with a string of ebony and silver prayer beads hanging from his neck. A sculptor would have been glad to carve that perfect negro head. Alimamy was as quiet and reserved as Siy was lively. I tried him in French, but he would not respond, and, withdrawing to a shadowy corner, he sat cross-legged on the mats without moving and without speaking during the whole evening. Young as he was, and powerfully built, there was nevertheless a certain soft melancholy in his handsome face. He was slow to smile, and he never laughed.

Immediately after these two came a slightly older man, who had lost a hand in the war. Siy and Alimamy had both fought in that conflict, and I met many others who had done likewise. Their opinions of Europe were not uncharitable. This man, whose name I never knew, was small and bright and lively as a bird, and his red fez was like a crest. He ought to have been

a black Calander from the *Arabian Nights,* or something.

Then came three teachers from the Medarsa, one of them in the handsomest robe I ever saw in Timbuctoo—a fair blue, embroidered with circles and triangles in white. He sat on the floor, close by Mahmadou Siy, who had reclined superbly in the steamer chair and, as the big interpreter waxed eloquent, listened keenly to him. When the others put questions, Siy laughed his replies; but when this quiet young teacher asked anything, Siy had obviously to stop and think.

Most of these arrivals were such big men that when two more came they preferred to sit on the threshold. There the outline of their dark heads was vague against the shadows beyond, but now and again they turned their faces towards the light from the lantern, and then their eyes and their white teeth shone.

The misgivings I felt about entertaining so many strangers proved to be without real cause. Mahmadou Siy, royal and benign in the deck chair, talked almost unceasingly, with many animated gestures and much laughter. It was all in the language of Timbuctoo. The little one-hand man kept fluttering from one place to another, the better to fasten his eyes on the eloquent Mahmadou, till at last he came to settle by me and to translate something of the long story, a courtesy for which I was grateful. It was often thus: black men and, later, Arabs would come in groups to visit and soon fall to talking animatedly among themselves. The host

was the stranger on such occasions; but he had before his eyes many faces fascinating to watch in their changes of expression, and a recompense in believing that the best proof of hospitality is that guests make themselves at home.

What was it all about, then, Mahmadou's brilliant tale? The absence to-day of such powerful holy men as had held sway in former times. Why, only ten years ago a native employed in the post office robbed the safe of a big sum of money. Having hidden this away, he went to beseech the protection of a holy man. The holy man prayed with him, and writing for him a sacred charm, said, "Carry this always with you; walk boldly where you will." So the young man went in the streets, and walked up and down before the post office; and though the Christians looked from their windows, and though they knew well it was he who had stolen the money from their safe, they laid not a hand on him to drag him into the courts of the "Romi."

"There is scarcely a holy man with that power to-day," the teacher said.

To this they all agreed, but apparently held the fact less to be lamentable than curious. I looked at Alimamy, the young holy man who was, like myself, a stranger in the town. Did he believe in the possibility of such a power within himself? Had he vowed himself to a life of denial, of loneliness and unkemptness, such as that through which saints of all times and lands have achieved miraculous grace? His eyes were half

closed. In truth, he understood little of the language of Timbuctoo, and had surely given over trying to follow Mahmadou Siy.

There were other tales of holy men, of the rigor of their lives and their contemptuous defiance of the invader. There was, even to-day, one such man in Timbuctoo; but when the Europeans had taken possession of the city, he had shut himself up in the innermost court of his house, and never did he come forth into the streets, not even to go to the mosque. And he received almost no one, and spent his days and nights in prayer.

At last Mahmadou Siy turned to me with elegant gestures and not less elegant French.

"But, my dear friend," he said, "you do not understand our tongue and hear nothing of all this. Besides, it is now time for you to sleep."

Gracefully and with no clatter they bestirred themselves. Shaking hands with me, they thanked me for my hospitality and wished me good night, and having slipped their feet into their sandals, stood a moment in the starlight of the terrace. I urged the young holy man to come and see me again, but he made no reply.

Below, at the heavy street door, whither I had descended with them all, Mahmadou said:

"When we came, we found the door of your house open and walked in. Your boy is out and we have been sitting upstairs, and anyone might have entered

and stolen. In this city you must lock your door, my friend. There are thieves who make no noise, and they will steal from you because you are a white man."

Earnestly the little one-hand man echoed this warning. Then the outer door creaked behind them. There was a bolt to shoot, but Omar might come early in the morning and rouse me from my bed to open for him. That night, and many nights after, the door remained unlocked.

II

Just after breakfast the next day, Omar being already gone to the market, there silently appeared at the threshold of my room a young black man who wore nothing but the tatters of a pair of O. D. breeches. His round head was smoothly shorn; his eyes, unlike those of most black people, were small as shoe buttons, and not at all steady in their look. But he held in one mud-caked hand a little basket of carrots, while with the other he removed the narrow band of tape which he had knotted round his head in symbol, at least, of a turban; and so standing in the doorway, uncovered and ready to smile, he offered me the carrots.

"I come from my master," he said, "Mahmadou Siy, the interpreter. He told me to bring you these carrots from his garden, where I am the gardener's helper."

"And your name?"

"My name is Baba, Mahmadou Baba. You may call me Mahmadou. You are a good white."

He spoke French easily, in a low, smooth voice. The officer for whom he had once worked as boy had taught him how to cook, he said; so that he was fully trained to be my boy if I would take him. Was he not happy working in the garden for so fine a man as Mahmadou Siy? No; Mahmadou Siy spent all his money on women, and he with two wives elsewhere; and at the end of the month there was seldom money to pay the gardener. Besides, the interpreter wished him to do work about the house as well, and though he was fed for this, the old woman who was cook in the house had a vile temper and accused him of many things.

"My life is hard. I am a poor boy. My mother is dead and my father gone away to Niafunke, and I have a little sister and a baby brother to provide for."

Yet he would not accept a bit of money from me, protesting that he had not come to beg. He accepted a cigarette, but, pointing to his bare feet and legs, his arms, his tatters, all caked with soil of the garden, he refused to come into the room to smoke. Rather, he sat on the threshold, content. When his cigarette was done, he must return to the garden, where the gardener would be waiting to scold him. So he left, as silent on the stairway in his bare feet as he had been in coming up.

In a minute or two young Alfa rushed into the room, breathless with excitement.

"What was Baba doing in your house?" he panted.

"He must not come to your house. He is the worst thief in all the country."

This was a rude awakening from Baba's soft, pathetical turns. Still, there were the carrots.

"That's all very well, but Baba must not enter this house again." And Alfa flew to the little window which looked down into the court, and peered and cocked his ears. He returned to me in no way calmed. "Baba has spent most of his life in prison for thieving. He has just come out of prison."

That seemed exaggerated.

"But," Alfa screamed, "can't you see how fat he is?"

Extraordinary evidence, which Alfa must explain. A man is well off in prison; he has not too much work to do, and he has plenty of rice to eat three times a day, or corn, and sometimes meat.

"Look at me," he pleaded; "see how thin I am. That is because I am honest. And Baba shall not come to your house again."

Alfa utterly scorned the suggestion that a man coming from prison should be given a chance to live straight. For lots of black men prison was a bit of good luck. Because a thief had got fat in prison, would he steal the less? It was agreed, however, that until Baba did steal something from the house, he should be allowed to come into it. And Alfa would keep watch. "My eyes see better than the white man's," he said; "and my ears are keen. I know everyone in the town, and what goes on in it, and if a stranger came to town I

should know him for a thief or not by one glance at him." I maintained that Baba would not steal.

There was another Alfa who used to come often and at all hours to the house. He was older than the youngster who had attached himself so closely to us, and therefore we called him Big Alfa. Big Alfa was at once self-important and very emotional. From his mother he had inherited a faint strain of Arab blood; and though he could not speak Arabic except for a few literary phrases, mostly from the Koran, which he had learned during fragmentary studies at the Medarsa, he fancied himself a little above most of his pure-blooded fellows. Besides, he had inherited likewise from his mother a considerable sum of money, and he enjoyed to the full the reputation of being a very rich young man.

Yet everyone knew he had lost a good part of his fortune. Big Alfa minded this not a bit. Loss or gain mattered little to his spirit, were only the figures big enough. And so I have seen him, in telling of the recent loss of ten thousand francs, soar into an ecstatic mournfulness, and there, his eyes softened with unshed tears, the mere diminution of his possessions forgotten among the trivialities of the world, idolize the grandeur of his loss.

Like most black men, he took me to have a great deal of money because I was white. It avails nothing telling a black man you have not, for he refuses to believe you. But when once, in answer to his inquiry, put with breath-stilling earnestness, by the way, I spoke the

humble figure of my wealth, he believed me. At the moment he held a lighted cigarette in his fingers. In silence he extinguished this and laid it down carefully.

"It is true, then, my friend," he said, in a voice blurred with emotion, "that you are poor. I, as you know, am rich. But I will come to see you every day as I have always done. Only, I will smoke no more of your cigarettes. It is not right for the rich man to smoke the poor man's cigarettes."

Thereafter, though I often urged one upon him, he held true to his word. But he would sit close to me as I wrote of a morning, watching the typewriter, and the smoke of my own cigarette. When I had squashed out the fire of one in the ash tray, Big Alfa would study this end profoundly. With the fluid movement of a serpent uncoiling lazily, he would bring forth from some pocket of his robe the barrel of a broken fountain pen, would extend one delicate hand and recover the cigarette end, would fit it into the broken rubber tube and light it. Still like an amiable serpent, he would slowly eddy into repose, and with moist eyes would thoughtfully inhale the few puffs and sigh over my poverty. Not a jerk of movement and not a word.

Big Alfa was something of a mystic, too. He wore several charms and he believed in their potency to keep at a distance those evil spirits which rise out of the cold sands at night and come in close to the houses. He had once met an evil spirit, a thing of white mist and teeth;

but, quickly bringing one of his charms to his lips, he felt no fear, and the thing vanished.

One night, coming in from a walk through the dunes with Big Alfa and a youngster named Ba, I discovered that I had lost my glasses from my pocket. Ba, who could see in the black night, to say nothing of the starlight which lay on the desert, at once turned back over the way we had come. But Big Alfa halted him sharply and commanded him to wait. The rich young man picked up a handful of sand. Standing quite motionless, he murmured some sort of incantation, then, opening his hand, gently blew the sand away.

"This," he explained thoughtfully, "will not necessarily lead us to your glasses, but it will prevent anyone who comes across them from touching them. If we do not find them to-night, they will still be where you dropped them, to-morrow, and the next day, and for seven days."

We were then permitted to retrace our steps and Ba soon spied the glimmer of a star in one of the lenses.

Big Alfa, I believe, fancied himself endowed with unusual spiritual powers, and sometimes dreamed of becoming a holy man. On this, it seemed, rather than on his wealth and his social prestige, he shaped his demeanor in the presence of his fellow townsmen. He was overbearing towards almost all the young men. The poor expressed their resentment of such an attitude slyly and maliciously; still, on the whole they appeared to accept his superiority, as I did, though my young

Alfa, who had not a cent to his name or a whole garment to his body, could not endure the presence of Big Alfa and left the room when he came, like one animate sneer.

Now, one morning, before Big Alfa and me, sitting at the table, appeared Baba at the bright threshold in his rags. And Big Alfa saw him, and shook his fist at him, and roared:

"Get out of this house!"

It was awful in its suddenness and its violence. Big Alfa frowned down upon me with a brow of thunder.

"That man is the worst thief in town," he declared.

Baba did not go away, but sat down on the threshold, turning his back to us, and wept quietly.

"He is a thief, a thief!" Big Alfa shouted, without mercy. "And his father was a thief before him and always in prison, and even his mother was a thief. Go away! Go away from this house!"

Then Baba stood up, and with his head fallen on his naked black breast, went out of our sight. Just like Young Alfa, Big Alfa ran to the little window which surveyed the court, and watched thence till Baba had crossed and we had heard the creak of the heavy door behind him. His indignation was deep; and since Occidental idealism had in similar case failed utterly, I let him talk on. Gradually he grew calmer and wound up on a note of serious caution, reminding me that things were not as they should be in my house if Baba could

walk in without challenge while Omar was out and we were upstairs.

He took his leave. Hardly had he had time to descend the stairs when, like an apparition out of the brilliant light of the terrace, soundless and immediate, Baba stood before me at the threshold. Had he sneaked back into the house and concealed himself in some corner till Big Alfa should be gone? Well, there he stood, half naked as usual, but very erect, and in his tiny eyes glowed the fire of resentment. Swiftly he came in across the mats and sat down at the table opposite me.

"He is a cruel man and he has no right to say such things. I have been in prison, but I am not a thief. Take me away with you."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Anywhere away from Timbuctoo. It is true that my father was in prison, but he is not here now, and my mother is dead. I am sick of walking in the streets of this town. The men and women cry after me, 'There goes Baba the Thief'; and the children run away from me. Do you know what it is when no one will speak to you and no one will play with you, but everyone calls you Thief and hides in the doorway till you go by?"

He talked in a dull voice; the simple phrases had no specious ring. In a pause I asked him how he could leave the little sister he had told me of. He pointed his beady eyes at me a second.

"You do not believe I have a little sister? She is thin because she cannot eat enough now that corn and

rice have gone to two francs the measure, and Siy pays me only half a franc a day."

I gave him a big piece of chocolate. He broke off a small bit for himself, and wrapped the remainder in a rag to take home to the little sister. We nibbled in silence awhile; but he meanwhile showed more and more that he was agitated. His hand trembled; his breast rose and fell more rapidly. He leaned closer and closer to me, and at last whispered:

"He, of all men, has no right to cast the prison in my teeth."

"Who?"

"That Big Alfa. He has been in prison more than I."

Up to this point I had been able to detect no evidence of sham in Baba; here, of a sudden, I began to wonder how thoroughly he was false. I quite realized that the very crudeness of the charge might prove it only a flash of resentment. Yet doubtless my pride was insulted by his thinking he could influence me merely by so stupidly discrediting another of his race. After he had gone, I decided, much to my distaste, that we had perhaps better keep an eye on him while he was in the house.

III

Early the next morning, while still the desert chill which set us all shivering was in the air, Baba appeared

again in the doorway, straighter than ever against the cold blue light of the terrace.

"I have brought my little sister to see you," he announced, and turning, spoke to some one out of my sight.

"She is timid," he apologized, and went to fetch her. In the silence I heard the cry of a child softened to whimpering. Baba dragged his little sister to the threshold. He bade her sit down there, which she did, like an odd bird teetering on the sill.

Coming into the room then, Baba said:

"That is my little sister."

It was a girl child perhaps six years old. The miserable rags veiled no detail of her body, all bones, over which the black skin was stretched and grayed like worn thin leather. It was a famine child, shivering with cold, almost wasted away but for the enormous eyes fixed on me in terror. No approach to her was possible. At my slowest step towards her she shrank away; at the gentlest word she cowered. A bit of candy should win a child's trust, but in the end I had to give it to Baba to convey to her. Her hand closed on it like the slow claw of a bird, and she went away into a corner of the terrace with it, but did not dare put it to her thin lips.

Baba said again: "That is my little sister. You see."

There was nothing to be gained by her staying here where she was so terrified.

"You had better take her away," I said. "And here are five francs for you."

He protested that he had not brought his little sister here to beg.

"Take it," I said, "but do not tell anyone I gave it to you. If you do, everyone in town will be running in."

So he accepted the gift, and promised that no one should know whence it had come to him. He would have his sister say thank you; but on being dragged out of her corner, she all but screamed, and we let the thanks rest unspoken. They went down the stairs together, she almost falling from each uneven tread, or dangling from her brother's hand like a small scarecrow picked up in a field.

I now realized how deeply Baba's accusation against Big Alfa had shaken my faith in his ingenuousness. That waif—there was no doubting her thinness, her misery; but was she Baba's sister? That I never knew and never shall know. He might have picked her from nowhere in the streets to act her dumb and pitiful rôle in his play to my sympathy. But I am inclined to think she was his sister. When he had once dragged her to the threshold, she seemed to have no fear of him at all. In fact, if any expression altered by a shade the constant terror in her face, it was the trustfulness with which she looked up at him when he came near her. She even swayed a little towards him. As for him, he was gentle with her; not out of pity, surely, for during that scene

he must have been quite satisfied with her so perfect misery, but perhaps out of affection. Still, the black people, both men and women, are astonishingly gentle with children. I have known white people who trusted their children absolutely to black men whom they accused of great wickedness.

There is time to think in Timbuctoo. The hubbub swelled in the market place; the sun drove away the chill and beat down the terrace in light. At least the child was warm by now. Beyond the doorway, in which already so many pictures had silently framed themselves, powdery dust of sand, golden in the sunbeams, floated against deep purple shadows. Through the windows to the north came faintly the voice of some black man on the tower of the mosque, calling to noon-day prayer.

Suddenly I heard noise and shouting on my stairs. Surely many people were trying to rush up at once and were clogging each other in the narrow ascent.

"Monsieur! Monsieur!" they were calling.

Out of the shadow and confusion of the stairway Mahmadou, the interpreter, shot up into the sunlight flooding the terrace. His orange turban, partly unwound, streamed about him, and his robes billowed with his panting. What he was shouting I could not catch, for like a rocket at the tail of another, the one-armed man shot up into the sun and shouted; and then Omar, and then two or three men of the town, and last a tall black policeman with red fez and gleaming brass medals;

and all talked and shouted at once. Out of the din only one phrase emerged distinctly: "Is it true? Is it true?"

We could get nowhere till silence had been restored, and Mahmadou Siy appointed spokesman.

"Is it true," he then asked, "that you gave my boy Baba two francs?"

I saw no need to say it was five and not two I had given him.

"Yes," I answered, "I gave him money."

They deflated themselves with long "Ahs," and stood round, a little disappointed but very picturesque, looking to Mahmadou Siy to tell the whole story. This he proceeded to do, though not without many interpolations from the others.

"I was in my office," began Mahmadou Siy, "and a man came running from the market place and said to me: 'Baba is buying things in the market place. He has money. He has stolen. O thief, thief!' 'What has he bought?' 'He has bought an elbow of cloth from the weaver, and salt and rice.' 'Then he has stolen,' I said; and we ran to the market. We ran to the weaver, and I asked, 'Has Baba bought of you?' And the weaver answered, 'An elbow of cloth. And he paid me tanka and went on. And when he had gone, I said to myself, surely Baba has stolen, and bade this man run and tell you Baba had money and had stolen.' "

"Yes," said the weaver's man, stepping forward, "and I ran to tell Mahmadou Siy, and the woman in the rice market clutched my robe as I ran by and said: 'Baba

the Thief has bought rice and paid for it. Run and tell Mahmadou Siy Baba has stolen again.' "

"Then," said Siy, "we sought Baba in all the streets."

"Yes, we ran after Baba in all the streets," said the policeman, "and we caught him near the hut where he lives. I caught him. Is it not so, Mahmadou Siy?"

"Yes," cried Siy. "And I said to Baba: You have bought things in the market place for money. You have stolen again. Oh, you miserable thief! And he said, 'I have bought nothing.' "

"But he had with him the cloth under his arm and a small bowl of rice, so we told him he lied."

"Was it not clear that he lied? So he said he had bought things, but he had not stolen; that you had given him two francs."

"Yes," I said, "two francs." And I told them how he had come that morning with a starving waif, and asked if he had indeed a little sister.

They wagged their heads thoughtfully and mumbled; but agreed that Baba always said he had a little sister.

"Just the same," Mahmadou Siy declared, "you should not give him money. He is a thief."

"He has not yet stolen from me," I replied. "And because he has been a thief, will he always be a thief?"

Mahmadou Siy laughed heartily and the others joined with him.

"The woman who cooks for me had a fine new stew-pan, and yesterday morning Baba stole it. And my friend Alimamy, the holy man, he had a beautiful blan-

ket, and while he was praying this morning Baba sneaked into his room and ran off with it."

"What! Stole a blanket from a holy man while he prayed?"

This was too much. We roared with laughter; we bent double and choked with laughter; laughter flew from the terrace over the market place and tears ran down our cheeks. The black men slapped their thighs and I held my sides.

"And such a fine blanket!" Mahmadou Siy gasped.

"And to steal it while the holy man prayed!" the one-armed man snickered.

But the conclusion was that I must never give money to Baba, because, as all the world knew and as it must now be plain to me, Baba was a thief.

When they had gone, I called Omar in consultation. Omar said: "A thief is a man who steals. Yesterday Baba stole a pan from the old woman, and to-day a beautiful blanket from a holy man. But what has that to do with us? He has stolen nothing from us. And why does Mahmadou Siy, who is my countryman and whom I much admire, keep him still to work in the garden and send him round to us with the vegetables?"

In the cool of the afternoon Alimamy at last came to call on me. For all his youth and his magnificent physique, he was a gentle, dreamy man, who spoke slowly, and rarely with a smile. He had enough French, after all, to tell me of his wanderings over Europe in the war and of his wounds; to tell, picturesquely, how he

had returned to his native land, Dja, and there had decided to be a holy man.

"I heard," he said, looking out of the north window over the desert in the aloof and dreamy sadness which was peculiar to him, his heavily molded lips moving slowly, "that in Timbuctoo there was no holy man who went into the market place, and so I came. But there is little for me to do. I am not happy here. Sometimes I write two or three charms in a day; but many days none at all, though I sit in the market from sunrise to sunset. Then I can buy no kola nut, and my head aches for lack of it."

"So," I asked, "it is by the writing of charms that you live? And how much does a charm bring?"

"There are short charms for two francs and longer charms for five. Here no one will pay more than five francs; but in other places great holy men write charms for fifty and a hundred and two hundred francs."

The charms, I found, were oftenest phrases or texts from the Koran; and as Alimamy sat with me, I discerned that the first distinction of a holy man is his ability to read and write; then comes knowledge of the Koran; and then, surely, eloquence and some human understanding, born of shrewdness or of sympathy. His face was to my eyes very beautiful, black and flawless in modeling. So were his hands, big and powerful, yet with long slender fingers always playing with the ebony and silver beads which hung down from his neck across the pale blue of his robe. He was immaculately

clean, too. There was not the slightest hint about him of professional manner or professional pose. Rather, from his tranquillity, perhaps from the tones of his voice, sad and subdued for one of his years, though rich, there emanated the suggestion of some hypnotic or purely spiritual power.

"No," he went on, "I am not happy here. I am no longer welcome in the house of Mahmadou Siy, but I will go and live in another house, that one there, with the tower. And this morning, while I prayed at dawn, Baba the Thief came and stole my blanket."

"Ah, that was a wicked thing to do."

"It was written," he said, in Arabic, meaning that it was written in the Book of Destiny that his blanket should be stolen. He was without anger and without resentment. He merely added, "No, I am not happy here."

When he left, he smiled.

"I will come often to see you," he said.

IV

Baba appeared the next morning, bringing vegetables from the garden. He did not greet me, but standing in the doorway, said, clearly:

"I did *not* steal the holy man's blanket. The old woman hid the stewpan because she hates me, and then she stole the holy man's blanket and I know where she put it. She is a bad old woman. She has a box with

a lot of money in it, and I have nothing. Why does she call me a thief if she is not evil?"

Why, indeed, Baba?

He asked sadly to be forgiven, and when I questioned what there was for me to forgive him, he reminded me that yesterday he had broken his promise and told Mahmadou Siy I had given him money. But what could he do? Would I not please bear in mind that they had pursued him and that he had to tell about the money—at least a little about it? I assured him I would never forget that, nor ever forget that, after all, he had kept three-fifths of his promise, which is something even in the white man's world.

Now, all this went on during the first weeks of my stay in Timbuctoo, while still it was my habit to go for an early morning swim in the pool, sometimes leaving the Daggar shepherd in the kitchen, sometimes the house wholly empty and the street door wide open for Omar. Then, one morning, for no reason I can think of, I decided not to go down to swim. The morning was not especially cold; I was feeling perfectly fit. I just chanced not to go. I remember humming old hymn tunes while I shaved, amused to find myself in such a Western mood. When I went to throw away the shaving water I glanced down the stair and saw, standing by the kitchen door, the bottle of milk the Daggar had brought without my hearing a sound. Probably I saw something else, too, something moving or a shadow; for I stopped humming, set down the basin, and re-

turned across the terrace on tiptoe. And when I came to the head of the stairs and looked down, I saw a black arm close to the ground and a black hand about to close on the milk bottle.

Why did he not run when I shouted? He could have escaped from the court before I got to the bottom of the stairs, and no one descending the stairs could have seen more than a fleeing pair of legs. But he stood as if paralyzed.

Of course it was Baba. I hated to catch him. It gave no satisfaction of any kind to say the hard things that must be said. He protested that he had meant only to put the bottle inside the kitchen door so that no one else would steal it. But that black hand and arm had been too stealthy for honesty. Well, he was not to come into the house again, and the best time to leave it for good and all was now. Again his head fell on his black breast, his legs dragged on the way to the door. I held it open for him to pass through. He did not look back. At that moment I became convinced that the Angel of the Lord could have taken no pleasure in driving forth Adam and Eve from the Garden. It is a horrid business, putting people out, especially people mostly pleasant like Baba, and doubtless Adam and Eve. It makes one feel intolerably superior.

Not five minutes later young Alfa tore up the stairs.

"What has happened to Baba?" he cried, much excited. "He is walking through the streets with tears on his face."

I had not the heart to tell him, and he ran off to pick up news in the town. But, naturally, when Omar came I told him, and Omar said:

"Now he is a thief. Yesterday and the day before he brought only half the vegetables and I think he sold the rest."

It was nearly noon when Alfa reappeared, this time with Alimamy, who seemed the gentler for the youngster's fierce delight.

"All the town is hunting for Baba the Thief," Alfa announced.

"Where is he?"

"He is not a rat. There are not holes enough for him to hide in. Even in the desert he cannot hide. The police will find him; perhaps not in one day but before three days."

I told them Baba had been to the house early in the morning, and asked what he could have done since to set the police on his track. Alimamy, in his gentle manner, gave me the story. Many people had seen Baba weeping in the streets. Now, the old woman who cooked for Mahmadou Siy had a box with money in it. She did not live in Siy's house, but in a hut by herself. She kept the box in the hut. Baba went to the old woman's hut. She was not there, and he broke in and stole the box. Some one had seen him. Now he could not escape. He was not a rat. There were not holes enough for him to hide in.

Alfa interrupted: "Even if he hides in the darkest

hut, the sun rises higher. It will be hot. He will be thirsty. The police will watch the wells. At night there is the big moon. They will watch day and night, and they will find him before he can die of thirst or hunger."

Alfa foresaw every twist and turn within the cunning of the hunted man. He would have dragged me on the terrace to point out this and that corner of the light-drenched town, where Baba might pant a second in hope before running on in fear.

At last I told them what had happened in the house that morning. They listened in silence, and after I was done, Alimamy put me through a questioning.

"You go every morning to swim?"

"Yes."

"You did not go this morning?"

"No."

"It was not too cold this morning?"

"No."

"Were you feeling well this morning?"

"Perfectly."

"Had you gone this morning, Baba would have stolen the milk?"

"It looks that way."

"But you stayed in the house."

"Yes."

He leaned towards me.

"Why?" he almost whispered.

Alfa's eyes shone like stars. He, too, leaned towards me, and with lifted hand checked my response.

"Let Alfa tell you why," he said. "Allah is in your house."

We were all silent a moment.

"Yes, my friend," Alfa went on, his eyes glowing, "Allah is in your house. That is why nothing has been stolen from you, though your door is always open. The black thief is sharper than the white man. Always he steals from the white man, for it gives him pleasure. Why have not thieves stolen from you? Allah is in your house. Alfa does not flatter. This is true."

"No God but Allah," Alimamy breathed, "and Mohammed is his prophet."

Their great dark eyes were full of happiness. They smiled, not in rapture, but in peace. The chattering in the market place sounded far away; and through the room, from door giving on sunny terrace and from window looking to the north over the vastness of the Sahara, streamed the light, which, though its clarity and its hues are never to be caught in words, still plays in the memory over every recollection of Timbuctoo.

As they left, Alfa said: "Perhaps they will catch Baba before the sun sets. I shall know first when they have caught him and will run to tell you."

But they did not catch Baba before the sun set that day; nor did they catch him the next day, nor even the third day, for all Alfa's prophecy. Baba had disappeared. Rat or no rat, he had found holes to hide

in. I locked my house, not that I feared being robbed, but that I dreaded Baba's sneaking in to find refuge there.

A week went by. Mahmadou Siy came to chat; Alimamy visited me often; Alfa was always in and out. But no one of them had news of Baba.

Then, in the middle of one night, I heard from my bed a voice calling softly in the street below. For a while I thought I had been dreaming; but the voice was persistent, and I went to the window. The street was dim and gray in the light of a waning moon, and I could see no one in it, though the voice called me again softly. He was standing against the opposite wall, the black man, almost blotted out in its shadow.

"Do you not know me? I am Baba, Mahmadou," he said, very low.

"I could not see you for the shadow."

"I dare not stand in the light. If you will come down and open your door, I will run in."

"I will not let you in, because the police would find you here. Besides, I told you never to come again."

He was hungry, and I threw down bread and chocolate into the shadow. I hardly saw him stoop to pick them up, but I knew he got them. His voice, soft and melancholy, rose once more to the window: *"Bonsoir, monsieur, bonsoir."* Then he was gone.

But he came again, and in the broad light of day. Never did I suspect who was calling in that clear voice from the street, and when I looked down I hardly recog-

nized Baba in the uniform of a *tirailleur,* with jaunty shoulders and a red fez on his head. Badgered by the police, he had sneaked his way to the recruiting sergeant, who, glad to welcome so stalwart a young black, had asked no questions. So it had ended. Baba had now three good meals a day, and his little sister was taken care of.

He promised to come and see me the next week, when he should have won the broad sash of red flannel these soldiers wind about their waists; and this he did, telling me on that occasion that he fancied not to steal again.

Little Alfa remained scornful; but Big Alfa, so elegant and so mystical, would never again raise a minatory fist against Baba the Thief. And one day, as I was talking over the natives with another white man, we fell upon Big Alfa.

"He is a little simple-minded, but I don't think he is crooked. Prison took that out of him."

"Prison!" I cried, tormented by the shade of a misjudged Baba. "Big Alfa in prison?"

"Surely. He had a long term. It was technically forgery, but he is so simple that perhaps he did not realize what he was doing. Everybody knows it."

Ah yes; and Baba the Thief had but whispered it, and under what provocation!

Chapter V: Alfa's Christmas Present

I

JUST WHEN OR HOW ALFA first came into our house I do not know, but he probably stepped from the street into the courtyard alongside the first sack of baggage. One never moved with impedimenta of visible proportions without being accompanied by a string of young blacks, curious to note what was going on and ready to lend a helping hand in the hope of a few centimes. Alfa was doubtless one of these hangers-on, endowed with a little more assurance than the rest.

He was a stripling, too tall for his years. His voice was hardly changed, and though soft in speech, broke into shrill almost girlish shrieks when he laughed. At such times his head would roll, or he would double up on one long squeal. In the thin, unfilled face the eyes seemed as big as a gazelle's; but they never softened with tenderness or with the reverie of an adolescent. On the contrary, there was always a glint of irony or malice in them. Even through the shattered bursts of his laughter there darted the lance of his derision. When it was

warm, he went naked save for baggy pantaloons, much patched. If it was cold, he donned a native shirt so tattered that it was scarcely a covering at all, a shirt that bespoke utter poverty. In Alfa there must have been some streak of pride that resented poverty. At least, an inveterate resentment might account for his being so old and so intolerant for his years, for his being so maliciously and so indomitably a mocker.

The question as to whether or not the black man is intelligent may not be answered with a yes or no, for the simple reason that intelligence is so ill-defined a term. If it means, as we are likeliest to take it to mean in our own society, an ability to deal with mental abstractions, then, with certain reservations, no. The black man does not naturally reduce life to mental abstractions. If it means a long financial foresight, likewise no, with reservations. Naturally the black man is improvident. But the black man has an intuition so swift and so unerring as to transcend the ordinary processes of reasoning and to confound the rational white. With this intuition Alfa was no less endowed than other members of his race. He was not merely boasting when he asserted that he could recognize a thief at sight; and his judgments of white men, contemptuous or no, were so accurate that I only pray I may never hear, and my friends may be prevented from ever hearing, his judgment of me. However my pride and my self-esteem, as an individúal and as a member of a race, were outraged, whatever the fury into which he later drove me, I

grant the exceeding great probability that Alfa's judgment of me is accurate.

He knew every corner of Timbuctoo and most of the people settled in it; he knew the market place and the prices of things; he spoke French fairly well, Bambara a little, Arabic a little. Attaching himself to us even more closely than the baggage with which he had come into the house, that stripling rendered us, who were utterly strangers in his land, a thousand services, as guide and interpreter, as purveyor and as adviser. He was, I know, thoroughly honest, as honest, in his droll fashion of reckoning, as he was thin. He was invariably good-natured and fond of play. To him, whatever the scornful doom his young tongue holds over me, I owe most of my acquaintanceships with natives of the town; and I recall no hours more light-hearted than those in which we went together to swim in the pool, side by side over the sands towards the setting sun, I the uncouth white man, fully dressed, with helmet and glasses; he the young black, naked but for his pantaloons, possessing my towel to wind it in careless perfection round his head, and proudly displaying to the envious eyes of all we met my cheap celluloid soap box, which shone in his black hand with the yellow light of ivory.

After the bath, he would hail the young slave in scant blue tunic, with one fine copper anklet, galloping his master's horse for exercise round the pool; and talking with him, would leave me to the intoxication of the

sunset. In returning to the city, he would take a route through one of the groups of huts where nomads camped for a few days, or poor families lodged. The twilight deepened swiftly into night. The men had come in from their day's work and were doing odd jobs, mending the reed palisades or binding bunches of straw into the conical roofs of their huts. The women were pounding grain or, seated tranquilly on the sand, were fondling their babies. A few goats had been driven in from the brush, and hobbled donkeys stood about with heads dropped low. In the clear gray light he introduced me to his friends, Timbai the Giant, and Garva; and to members of his family: his uncle Saban, with his wife, Aissa, the grandfather, the grandmother, passive folk, not without dignity, for all their rags.

Who his immediate parents were I never learned. He, like so many blacks, used the words cousin and brother and sister, father and mother, freely. But there were big brothers and big fathers, little sisters and little mothers, which, were they taken literally, would foist upon this one youth innumerable and impossible consanguinities. A reasonable deduction: one father, a tailor and poor; one mother, whom he loved; a father's father, likewise a tailor and poor, but greatly revered. I think I never met any of these, and I did not know where they lodged. Alfa ate here and there; he slept, if he slept at all, either at his grandfather's or his mother's.

He was to be, himself, a tailor, and had already

served a bit of apprenticeship with his parents. He sewed rapidly and, so far as I could judge, well; could cut and make a native garment. Often he brought such work to the house and, sitting on the floor, sewed while I wrote letters or read. The needles in my little kit were much to his liking, the thread even more so; and he delighted in the small pair of scissors. But apparently he had given up his trade to come and be of service to me. There were some hints that his father disapproved of this; but the grandfather, according to Alfa, held that a good white was worthy of service. In any case, they were all poor; and often, still according to Alfa, could not buy food till he had brought them the money I paid him.

Like so many blacks, Alfa was at once lazy and full of untiring energy; lazy, that is, in preferring not to work, but seemingly inexhaustible in work from which there was no escape. One week he had to labor for the Government. About this I could hardly drag any information from him. Perhaps he thought it wise to keep silent as regards certain details in the administration of his country by the whites, with which he could have had little sympathy. As a matter of fact, natives who are unable to pay taxes are required to give a week's labor towards the maintenance of roads or of landings along the river or of other common benefits; much as farmers in outlying parts of our country are. Alfa was too young to come under the requirement himself; but

his father was poor and Alfa was probably doing his father's stint.

However it may have been, the work to be done was at Kabara. Alfa would leave before dawn and do the five miles through the sand on foot. He would work hard, there can be no doubt of that in view of the supervision, from sunrise till nearly sunset; and then return the five miles on foot to Timbuctoo. Only once in all the week did he get a lift part way on a camel. He would stop to chat a few minutes at my house, and then go off; and several times in that week I met him in some lonely street very late at night, hurrying somewhere with a great bale of straw on his head. He would pass me swiftly, without a word, his pride forbidding his recognizing me. Though he had been afoot since sunrise and laboring all day, his stride, despite the heavy load and the sands which slipped, was fleet and graceful.

So he could work all day and half the night without flagging. But he had much rather not work. His tasks about my house were quite haphazard. I hardly knew what they were. At first, he ran many errands; but as Omar learned the ways and means of the town, he was less and less often called upon to do so. He conceived at once a strong affection for Omar, and often gave him a hand with the dishes. Sometimes he had the mats out on the terrace for a sweeping. He served as interpreter on all sorts of occasions; and later, when the Arabs came for tea, he would fetch the kettle and the

glasses, the tea and sugar, would sit with us on the mats and drink by far the most tea; then, perhaps, wash the glasses, sighing with happiness.

For such odds and ends of work I paid him the royal sum of fifty centimes a day. That made fifteen francs a month. There were lads working as full-time boys in the town for thirty francs a month; working hard day and night, cooking, laundering, cleaning, and thinking themselves not too badly paid. For Alfa there were many little extra gifts; his fifty centimes was almost more gift than wages, and he always had it whether he had done any work in the day or not. He never failed to claim it, either. He kept count of it with a chilling exactitude.

Once he had a chance to buy enough material for a shirt for five francs, and he asked to be paid this amount in advance. Very well, he should have the five francs then and there, and nothing during the following ten days. He ran off delighted to buy the stuff for his shirt; and the next two days he came to the house morning and afternoon to sew on it. During the following eight he came regularly, not, however, with the purpose of doing any work about the house. He dodged every chance of work being put upon him. He was even shy of taking me to walk, and missed many an appointment. No; he came with the sole object of counting the number of days since I had paid him the five francs, and the number which must elapse before his payments should

recommence. This he did in several modes, in every one of which he contrived to cut one day out of the reckoning; and, cleverly or not, he did this so insistently as eventually to confuse me. In the end I was not sure whether I gave him the next fifty centimes on the ninth, tenth, or eleventh day; but I think now it was probably on the ninth.

Fifty centimes: with the exchange then prevailing, two cents! But that must have nothing to do with it. It was not a fair wage; it was a *generous* wage for the work he did. At least, I fell into the self-satisfying error of esteeming it so, of judging the payment in relation to the job of washing a few glasses or sweeping a few mats. And Alfa washed fewer and fewer glasses and swept the mats less and less often.

I failed to put in the reckoning the time he spent with me. Like any happy child, he was the best of companions, and he had more than a child's sense and far more than a child's knowledge of places and languages and things to put at my service. We had many and many a happy time together, he, I still believe, as well as I. But it was not by contract nor by the time clock; and it did not occur to me that his contribution was reducible to a cash basis and payable in specie of the country. And in downright stubbornness, I still maintain that were our good times together set down in best double-ledger style, it is none too sure that Alfa would come out creditor in it all.

II

I grant you, Alfa, that the white man has come and taken the black man's country, and that he cannot give much to the black man save money. That I know better than you. I am willing to admit that in the last analysis the good white can only be the white who gives, and gives without restraint, money and things. Our ideals are questionable, and our reforms tolerable only in relation to our own civilization, in which God forbid you should ever be mangled and destroyed.

But, look here. You remember the night I had the fever? Omar said I was not to stay in the house alone, and he summoned his friend Mahmadou, and they watched most of the night below in the kitchen, Mahmadou playing on the little gimbri, and singing so softly it was like a dream. And you, you stretched an extra mat on the floor by my bed and lay there all night, and fetched me water and quinine, and answered at once whenever I spoke. That was good of you, Alfa. It could not have been much fun; nevertheless, you were wrapped in my Sudanese blanket and you lay warmer than you had lain for many nights.

And the next night. You remember? I could not go out, of course; but you went out for a whole two hours, and what did you go out in, Alfa, while I was dozing and did not see? You went out in my jellaba and my green sweater and my socks and my sandals and my glasses and my helmet; and you strutted about the

streets, young cock, and had as good a time as ever I had with you and Timbai and Garva at the dance. When you came in, I did not scold you; and that was good of me, Alfa, as white men go.

You remember the nights when Black Mohammed and Youba came? Mohammed would sit at my typewriter and try to work it; while Youba, industrious boy, unraveled the old strips of cotton he had brought and twisted the strands into new sewing thread. You would smoke my cigarettes, and tell stories, and dance, screaming like a wild boy. Then, what would you all do but put my guitar in my hands and force me to sing "All God's Chillun Got Wings" over and over again, till you had the tune and even the semblance of the English words. To be sure, you clapped your hands, all of you, to the singing, and rolled your heads, and shouted in glee; and they were rollicking evenings for us all. But did I owe you fifty centimes for that? Youba never claimed anything.

Alfa says: "Speaking of cigarettes, you were exceedingly disagreeable and overbearing one day. You told me I did nothing in your house but smoke your cigarettes. Well, I never smoked another one, did I?"

No, you never did. But I saved the butts from Big Alfa and put the tobacco aside so that you had a big heap every other day for your pipe. And your pipe? Who bought that? and who bought Timbai's pipe, and who bought tobacco for your uncle Saban? At least, you said it was for him, and he's a better man than

you'll ever be, a fine and noble man, which are words you do not know the meaning of, you spiteful imp!

It is idle to play at having talks with Alfa now that it is all over and the one terrible talk we did have written down by recording angels. And there are still so many things of other kinds to recall. Saban was indeed a man of noble bearing. He stood a full six feet three in his bare feet, clothed in rags, but upright, his shoulders squared, his fine head, already lined with care, held high. He lived with his wife and his babies, his father and his mother, in one of the huts outside the town, a fisherman by trade when water was right for fishing in the Niger. Alfa and I went often to see him and those who gathered before his hut in the early night. Tired as he might be, he always walked back to town with us, a silent and courteous escort.

One of the infants overturned a jar of scalding water on its hand and arm. At my suggestion, Saban brought the child to my house, and eventually I was able to persuade him to take it to the infirmary. From time to time thereafter Saban would drop in to see me for a moment and wish me good day. In him I first discerned the qualities of the simple black man, which later on the river unfolded before me in their nobility.

Under the starlight Timbai the Giant was often sitting on the sands before Saban's hut, cross-legged like a lean though bland Buddha. He had been summoned to meet me, but as a matter of fact I paid him homage. He was a church spire of a man, with the Bella crest

of hair on his crown and the Bella braids dangling down his nape; and mostly rags and an altitudinous smile. Pictures again, pictures of Timbai as he so often appeared in my house, and especially one morning when I opened the door on him sitting in the street in the sun with a gourd of little silvery fishes in water. A gift? An offering from the great Timbai? Indeed so; but does not one good gift demand another, says the gentle smile, and what so good a gift as five francs, though the fish are worth but two; or twenty-five, that Timbai may have new pants? Then there was Timbai the hunter, lean from the brush, with two hares; and there was Timbai sick and miserable on a cold morning, bent in the chair and coughing, who besought a pin to fasten the ragged blanket round his shoulders. His all but naked breast was scarred with hot knives, so the cough might be stopped. And there was Timbai discovered in the drowsy heat of afternoon stretched on a mat in my kitchen, asleep; and Timbai waiting in the dim glow of the brazier to take me to dance in the tom-tom, where he, too, would dance, and dance marvelously, for fifty centimes. Garva was there, who would dance for fifty centimes. And the women pressed round and asked for fifty centimes and cigarettes, and the children had their little hands in my pockets seeking fifty centimes. Fifty centimes!

Few were the tots in that city who could speak French; yet fewer still who could not cry out after you, *"Donne-moi cinquante centimes."* With the children

in the open it was not so bad. One could shout before they could, *"Donne-moi cinquante centimes."* Then they would laugh in astonishment and run in circles round you and grab your hands, dancing with you across the sands, and everybody singing, *"Donne-moi cinquante centimes,"* and forgetting in the play what it was all about. The strangest thing was that fifty centimes, which in that land is a lot of money, could thus be so soon forgot.

In one respect the begging among the African natives does not differ from that among the European and American peoples: it gets on your nerves. In other respects there are great differences, though you may often be hard put to it to bear these in mind. The majority ask of you not because they are in need, but because in their eyes you are wealthy; and if you refuse them kindly, they will smile, or even laugh. Money does not yet mean to them all it means to us. Once a group of young Touaregs stopped me in the street. Feeling myself honored by their greeting—for the unbending of these haughty men is honorific—I was deeply mortified to catch the only French words known in the groups: *"Donne-moi cinquante centimes."* But there was no taint of begging in this. The Touaregs almost never have money. Their wealth is in their flocks, and they supply themselves by barter. Here were these young men in town, with no goat in their pocket book to trade in for a bit of tea or sugar. I passed on, rather ignobly, I fancy; for had I found myself needing some-

thing in their land and asked them for it, they would either have killed me as an enemy or granted it me as a friend, either of which is more admirable than a supercilious uneasiness.

And back of it all rests something of an ancient and lordly tradition. You may not refuse a man the gift he asks. By the same bond, he who gives a gift may ask one in return. Therefore, among the natives, the system checks itself. A black man may demand a gift from another black man, but he will hesitate before opening himself to a reciprocal request. The white man, alas for his nerves, is held to be less compromising.

On the evening after his first visit, Mahmadou Siy, who was a prosperous man, sent his servant round for some of my olive oil, that he might eat a *salade* that night. There was a notable in the town, who sent his servant for a bit of kerosene, that he might light his lamp in honor of a newly arrived guest. The night I had the fever I wanted some milk, but it was too late to find any for sale in the town. This was of no great importance, however. Largely for the fun of it, I summoned Omar and Alfa and said to one: "Go to Mahmadou Siy's house. Say to him, 'My master gave you olive oil; he is now sick of a fever and bids you send him milk.' " And to Alfa I said: "Go to Boubakar's house and say to him: 'My master gave you oil for your lamp,' " etc. The look of amazement on those two black faces was enough to cure any fever. They stammered; they consoled; they did everything but make ready to

go. Omar confessed, with a sad look, that I was not likely to get milk in those quarters. I wish now that I had insisted.

Moreover, in the fine etiquette of the country you may not refuse a proferred gift. One night when I was tracking down a tom-tom in the outskirts of Bamako, I asked my way of a black man, a Bambara, and offered him a cigarette meanwhile. This he accepted and smoked, giving me some information on native feasts. When he had done with it, I offered him another. The man accepted it, hesitated a moment, then said in a low voice: "Among my people it is held to be rude to refuse a gift; but, sir, I am not in the habit of smoking and do not like to smoke. I hope you will not be offended if I beg you to take back this cigarette." So I was taught that you may not refuse a gift.

But little by little I realized in Timbuctoo that in accepting a gift I was making it difficult for myself not to give away most of my money and my belongings. One day a young Arab brought a beautiful Touareg mat of straw and leather to the house as a present to me. He appeared offended by my offers to pay him for it, and so I accepted it, though uneasily. The very next day, and early in the morning, he came round to ask me for twenty-five francs to have his head shaved. (The price for having your head shaved was fifty centimes.) My first impulse was to take the mat down from the wall and bid him sell it for the price of a head shave. But this would have been needlessly insulting. I

kept the mat and I gave him no money; and I do not know which of us learned the greater lesson that day. One came to dread the offer of a gift, with its apparent friendliness, more than the request for one.

But I would not give the impression that in Timbuctoo one lives among clever extortioners. This is most emphatically not true. There are black men even in Timbuctoo, a city under the whites, who find it hard to ask a favor of a white; and there are poor black men, like Saban, like the water carrier, like many others whose names I did not know, who remain racially proud. It is fair to remember that the old tradition, which cloaks so much slyness, was once a grand tradition, and still is so among those Africans who have come but little under the influence of the whites. It is breaking down under the advance of the civilization of which we are so proud. And in the irritation of our great nerve Property, we fail to see that the free-for-all standards which we try to shove in the place of some grand old un-Aryan virtues are not at all worshipful in the eyes of the natives, and that little about us is desirable or acceptable save our money.

III

Three days before Christmas a couple of white men arrived in town. This was all the more an event because they came unequipped, without bed or blankets or even a speaking knowledge of French, and some of

us had to take a bit of care of them. They were clever men, even brilliant men. Their specialty was pornographic literature, and they were traveling among all the races of the world with plenty of money to aid their search for curious, ultrarefined practices recorded in only the rarest books. Any one could have told them that Timbuctoo would be rather unprofitable from this point of view, as would indeed be the voyages among other black races of Africa which they contemplated. They were unwilling, however, to relinquish the hope that money might produce some strange show in Timbuctoo.

As we three were walking in the market place soon after their arrival, whom should we meet but Alfa, who, pulling me by the coat, asked me to arrange for him to be their guide, or rather their boy. They were so unfamiliar with the town, needing many simple things which Alfa could find for them, that the arrangement was easily made, in spite of Alfa's ragged appearance. They spoke of paying him twenty-five francs a day, a proposition I cautioned them to modify considerably. It nevertheless promised to be a lucrative affair for that young imp.

Without doubt he foresaw at once what would be demanded of him. That intuition of his was never asleep. As the pander he stood to win double money; and he did so, for all the injurious opinion he gave me of the man for whom he did the procuring. The man was unwisely lavish. There was some talk of salving

consciences with money, more senseless than it was cynical; for there was no question of conscience at all so far as the black women were concerned, but only a repugnance to having such relations with a white man to overcome. The women would surely have submitted even for considerably less than the sum Alfa probably allowed to come through to them. The project for the big show had to be abandoned, the men having to take a certain Niger boat, which arrived on the day before Christmas, a day or two earlier than it had been expected. One of them left with me a sum of fifty francs, a sort of bonus for Alfa.

Well, it was Christmas Eve. Alfa came in by appointment immediately after supper, and I gave him the money, without, however, mentioning Santa Claus. He was perhaps fifteen years old. Whatever sentiments of remorse I might have felt for my responsibility in the affair would have been entirely gratuitous. Alfa knew white men as well as I.

When he took the money, he counted it carefully, then looked at me as much as to ask if that was all. He next whispered the insulting word which expressed his opinion of the departed white men. But finally he leaned back in the chair with a deep sigh; his eyes grew soft as ever I had seen them; and he breathed blissfully: "Now I shall have new pants and a handsome, handsome robe." Which remark gave me a flashing vision of Wisdom. So that was that, and the way was cleared for Christmas.

To one brought up to snowy Christmas, the season in the far strange land of Timbuctoo was of an unnatural consistency, like melted ice cream. I should have done well to put it aside altogether. Yet I was repentant of my growing irritability with natives who sought gifts. To be sure, there was in my mind a singularly vivid resuscitation of days long gone by, which amounted almost to a trance, a nostalgic obsession quite unrelated to homesickness, though perhaps owing to memories of the season; yet Christmas appeared to me also with something of the virtue of a homœopathic nerve tonic. I had been for some time planning to go out on Christmas Eve to that group of huts where the charcoal woman and Timbai and Saban and his family dwelt and distribute a few five-franc notes: this in memoriam, say, to an idealized Self. Understand that five francs would be to these people equivalent to five-dollar gold pieces to poor people at home. Perhaps the chief point to remember is that I reckoned it so. There was not the remotest possibility of their understanding such lavishness; and I may assert, in attentuation of my conceit, that I was quite aware that in their thanks to Allah they would overlook the miserable human agency through which his beneficence had been articulated.

Before starting out on the round with Alfa, however, I did, by way of explaining my prodigality and with conscious emphasis on the fact that the feast comes but once a year, try to present to him an idea of Christmas. One wonders how to tell, and then launching forth.

ALFA IN HIS NEW ROBE

flounders, not in how, but in what to tell. Try to tell yourself just what a twentieth-century Christmas is, and see how far you can get; then return to the beginning and try to lead a stanch young Mohammedan black along the way. What to tell Alfa to make him understand how glad I was to give money away that night, and how glad I should doubtless be a year from that night, but not so glad, in principle, on any night between!

The mystical significance of the time, the doctrine of vicarious atonement, what could they mean to a youngster who believed immediately in God and in a stiff Day of Judgment? I left such fundamentals untouched. There was the picturesqueness, the snow and the fir trees, and candles and reindeer. Alfa did not know what snow was, and could not have imagined camels riding over housetops. There was the metropolitan Christmas spirit: the big department stores glittering with lights, the tired shopgirls trying to be cheerful, everybody going home with glad faces and many bundles and some few a little tipsy. The only element in all this Alfa could have understood was keeping up the prices in the shops during the heavy sales. But at last there were the children, their expectations, the stockings all hung by the chimney with care. This I drove in, till I suddenly remembered that black children wear no stockings and never saw a chimney.

Alfa noted that I had gasped out beyond the possibility of resuming. "I knew there was some such white

man's feast about this time," he said, "but the French people will give things away next week,[1] and this day week the kids will all come round for tanka. Since you are going to give all that away to-night, next week I will keep you indoors and shoo them off."

For a moment, then, I thought of postponing. To have it all to do over again on New Year's Day would be too costly. But Christmas prevailed. We went out, Alfa and I, and hurried along through the sand of the narrow streets, out from the city and into the fringe of the great desert.

The moon was more than half full, blinding to look at, and in the brilliance of her light the sands were snow. Before my dazed eyes light floated like a foam over all the earth. In these very places during the weeks just past I had seen camels come and go, the shepherds driving in their flocks, wandering families on the move, with their stupid dreamy donkeys or their humped cattle, women with jars of water on their heads, and men in flowing robes—all living and moving as they had lived and moved across the sands of Arabia and across the sands of Palestine in those days the Bible has pictured. I had seen thatched huts and babies asleep on straw the family donkey nosed, the beam of motherhood on women's faces, black faces, and women with baby at breast in the shade of some thorn shrub. Right here where I now walked life was going on to-day as it was

[1] The French keep Christmas as a church feast and reserve the exchange of gifts for New Year's Day.

going on even that night immortalized in Christian legend. I had seen, not the picture, but the thing itself.

All this I suddenly ceased to feel and see. In that foam of light were shadows that were fir trees, wraiths that took the form of an old New England farmhouse, glimmers that were candles lighted in windows. I felt in my nostrils the pinch of frost. Yes, the sand was snow, and I pulled my cotton jacket round me as if it had been an ulster. Was Christmas nothing but a delusion?

We pushed on through the sands, Alfa and I, towards the huts which I could not see for the daze of my mind.

"Well, Alfa," I said, "we'll go first and give five francs to the old charcoal woman. Then we'll go and give five francs to Saban, and five to his father and five to his mother and five to Timbai."

This was not so bad, after all. At least there was some joy left in giving bountifully at Christmas time.

"You are a good white," said Alfa, warmly. "And Aissa?"

"Aissa?"

"Yes. You must give something to her, too."

"If I give to Saban and his father and his mother, that's enough," I retorted, stiffly.

"Oh!" said Alfa, and we walked a way in silence.

I expected at every moment that he would present himself as qualified to receive a gift, but this he did not do, and my Christmas spirit returned at the thought of surprising him.

"Alfa, my lad, here's five francs for you, and, as we say at home, Merry Christmas."

There were fifty francs bulging in his pocket already, but I could dream, in this sweet season, that, being tainted money, they made my own gift pure gold.

Alfa took the five francs joyfully and hugged me.

"Oh, you are good, you are good!" he cried, and we walked on in the Christmas spirit triumphant.

After a while Alfa said, cheerfully:

"And the fifty centimes?"

"What fifty centimes?"

"The fifty centimes you owe me for to-day."

Metaphorically, I put my head down like an old bull in a Spanish arena and bellowed. Actually, I said in frozen and, I trust, freezing tones:

"That's a bit too strong. I don't consider I owe you any money."

"Oh," Alfa breathed, softly. "Then really you have given me only four francs fifty." And he gave a squeal of malicious laughter.

He danced on and I staggered behind him.

The old charcoal woman was in the gloom of the compound, and when I gave her the money she danced round the embers in the brazier, crying over and over again, "Baraka, Baraka, Baraka," which means thanks. Saban and his family were in their hut, and there were five francs for him and five for the old man and five for the old woman; but I would not linger with them, for I heard Alfa screaming outside: "Aissa! Aissa!"

and I ran out and grabbed him and said: "It's done. I'll not give another sou."

The gentle Saban, coming forth from his hut, bade me enter and sit with them. The pressure of his hand on my shoulder meant thanks. The old people looked out happily from the doorway. But my rage was growing hotter and hotter. Saban returned to town with Alfa and me, and no one spoke a word the whole way. At the door of my house he wished me good night and turned off, and Alfa started to follow him. But I stopped Alfa.

"You'll come round to-morrow morning and we'll talk over this matter of fifty centimes," I said; and there was no Merry Christmas in our parting on Christmas Eve, or any civil word.

In the morning he came round. Christmas morning.

"Sit down," I said, sternly.

Then this white man who was I, who came from the United States of America, where most of the world's gold is, who had three sets of underwear in Timbuctoo, and three pairs of trousers, and cotton jackets, and many shirts, and towels and fine soap, and handkerchiefs and several pairs of glasses, blankets and sweaters, and a typewriter and a safety razor, and books and paper and a silver pencil and two fountain pens, a fine Moroccan jellaba and a Moroccan bag of orange leather with a heavy silken orange cord; who had charcoal to give away, olive oil in the kitchen, plenty and plenty of rice and sugár and salt and spices—this white man sat

himself pompously opposite the thin, half-naked black lad and spoke as follows:

"Alfa, you have hurt me deeply. [The recording angel has not set down this monstrosity more faithfully than I.] I have taken you into my house and allowed you every liberty. I have given many things to your family and your friends. I have paid you fifty centimes for many a day when you did no work at all. Last night, Christmas Eve, when I made you a gift of five francs, you reclaimed fifty centimes more for the day's work; and on my refusing to pay you this, stated that I had given you but four francs fifty for your present. Now, Alfa, what work did you do for me yesterday?"

Alfa, at some loss to reply, tendered as worthy of consideration the facts of his having run an errand for Omar in the morning and having washed the tea glasses after the Arabs had gone.

"So," the white man went on, very exact, "say that is worth fifty centimes. Day before yesterday I gave you a block of paper and two pencils; yesterday morning a lot of thread and a needle. Let those things go. How many glasses of tea did you drink yesterday when the Arabs were here?"

Alfa said, "Five."

"Good. Five glasses of tea. Do you know that in Morocco you pay twenty-five centimes for a glass of tea?"

"Whew!" Alfa whistled, pleasantly. "It costs a lot, doesn't it."

"You drank five glasses. That makes one franc twenty-five. If I owe you fifty centimes for the errand and for washing the glasses, you still owe me seventy-five for the tea you drank."

You see, the white man knew well how important it is to teach the black man to reason, how very important to be firm and just with him.

"I am willing to allow you a franc for having interpreted between the Arabs and me. I owe you, therefore, twenty-five centimes. Here they are. Now, Alfa, you have been ungrateful for what I've done, and scheming to get more. I no longer have confidence in you. You need not come to the house any more. If there is special work to be done, I may summon you. Otherwise, you must stay away."

Alfa picked up the coin, and tilting his head back, gave me a long look and a queer little smile.

"Bien, monsieur," he said, softly. He turned in the door and said: *"Au revoir, monsieur, et merci."*

I never sent for him and he never came again but twice—once to show me the "handsome, handsome" new robe, and again on the evening before I left, to wish me good-by. For Alfa had been put out, not like Baba for the attempted theft of a pint of milk, but for contractual rectitude.

Alfa, when we meet again, shall we go down for a swim and shall you squeal your old squeal of delight when I shout "*Caiman*"? Will you lie on the mats of my room and con the multiplication table, and shall we

make again together the momentous discovery that six times eight and eight times six are the same? Shall we find the little guitar, Youba and Black Mohammed, you and I, and sing "All God's Chillun Got Wings," and roll our heads and clap our hands? And shall you ever again be so certain that Allah is in my house?

You will be a grown man then, and your ideas of white men locked in your black breast; and you may well doubt if Allah be in the house of white men, who have a strange feast they call Christmas, on which day they put black boys out for a matter of fifty centimes justly claimed.

So it was: fifty centimes—two cents—and Christmas morning.

Alfa, there is a white man's word, principle, and he is very vain of it and makes much use of it. It signifies a certain mental abstraction, though the white man himself is not just sure what, and with mental abstractions your brain is hardly fitted to deal. But put the sound of it well in your ear, and the instant you hear that sound, let loose your shrill laugh, in which there played, more than in almost any other I ever heard, the sting of derision.

Chapter VI: The Salt Caravan

I

FOR MANY CENTURIES Timbuctoo has been a salt market, serving a vast area along the Niger and far to the south. The mines from which the salt is brought are practically a three weeks' journey due north in the desert in the region of Taoudeni. Legend has it that even in times not so long past as many as ten thousand camels went in a single caravan north to the mines and returned laden with salt. To-day, owing to the importation of salt from Europe and to the opening of communications in many other directions, which have diverted general trade from Timbuctoo, the caravans are much smaller and there are only two yearly. But the departure of the fall caravan, El Azalail, for the mines and its return in December are the two outstanding events of the year.

There is a spring caravan, also, but less momentous. Smaller caravans, with general merchandise, largely dates, from Morocco or Algeria by way of Kidal to the east, create no stir. But in December, many days before the great caravan is expected, the wind of its coming is

in the air; tales of it are on the tongues of men; and you ask of your visitor, not if with the new phase of the moon the nights will turn sharper still, not if the water is still rising in the Niger, but what is the news of the caravan: has it passed Arrouan? has it been attacked? when will it come over the rim of the desert and on into the town?

It is composed, this great caravan, almost entirely of Arab merchants or their representatives. There are merchants of the town who send many camels north. There are likewise Arabs of the desert, who dwell by the springs and oases days away from Timbuctoo, who come with their camels to town, set forth thence with the caravan, bring back their salt to sell, and then return into the desert. There are others who hire themselves and their camels to traders. Now and again there are a few travelers, who take advantage of the caravan to follow the shorter but more dangerous route to Morocco, with it as far as Taoudeni. All these set forth from the city. Hardly out of sight from Timbuctoo, come in Arabs from Gundam to the west, and Bourem and even Gao to the east, and lengthen the line of camels marching on from day to day north across the sands.

They say it is wonderful to go with it. One is blistered by the sun and parched, and there is not water for baths; but the nights are cold and mysterious and grand. When they come to halt at the end of the day, all along the line a thousand tiny fires are lit, each of only a few twigs. Water must boil for the tea, the

sweetened tea on which almost solely the Arab may live and work for days among the vast sands. Swiftly night falls over the camp. The fires gleam like fine points of light and for a little while there is the tinkle of discreet music here and there. Then, as by the wave of a wand, the fires are extinguished, and in the great starlit space around, the men, wrapped in their blankets against the bitter cold, lie down and sleep, motionless on the sands. Only the grunt of the camels breaks the silence. But the guard is on watch.

For, ancient as the memories of the route itself are the stories of fierce pillagers who lie in wait along it. In the hope of maintaining peace over the desert region they have come to rule, the French have required a surrender of arms from the restless Arabs and Berbers who live in it. Not even a European may carry arms in that land without a strictly limited permit, or buy ammunition without special authority. The Administration, on its side, furnishes military escort for caravans which must traverse the desert through regions known to be dangerous, over which ride wild tribes of Arabs or Moors, seeking more than anything arms and ammunition.

These outlaw bands, almost unconquerable in the wastes to which they are habituated, enemy to the more peaceable tribes of Arabs and Berabish as well as to the blacks and Europeans, are known as *rezzous,* or *razzias.* They are swift and fearless in their attacks. And not

only do they move in extremely mobile groups, but the men have acquired a resistance to thirst greater than that natural even to the desert Arabs. This gives them a great advantage over the troops the French Government is able to send in pursuit of them. They can go two and sometimes three days without water.

In the regions of eastern Mauretania and of the French Sudan as far east as Timbuctoo, the *rezzous* are made up chiefly of Moors native to the Spanish colony Rio de Oro, on the Atlantic seaboard, a blistering, savage haunt. Thence they set out in October as the days begin to grow cooler. They work easterly across the northern part of Mauretania and the French Sudan nearly a thousand miles, swinging south in a vast arc, and returning towards their habitat in February at the approach of the hot season. Such a course takes them not only across the caravan routes, but back along the fringe of villages in the southern Sahara, many of which bolder groups will raid for camels and black slaves. Once returned within the Spanish territory they are safe from retribution at the hands of the French.

At such military posts as Timbuctoo, the French maintain companies of meharists—that is, black troops mounted on swift camels. Several of these may be quartered in the garrisons of the town. Others are held in movable camps a day or so out in the desert from Timbuctoo, which are known as *carrés,* being no more than squares inclosed within hedges of thorn shrub, terrible

to barefoot foes. Escorts for the caravans are usually furnished from garrisons in the town. For the pursuit of especially swift and daring bands, however, the Government depends upon the *partisans,* a sort of voluntary militia of Arabs who find it favorable to their own security and prosperity to stand with the French. They are not enlisted and they are not in uniform. They have their own camels; but the Government supplies them for the occasion with arms and provisions and pays them by the day. All are expert marksmen, and their experience makes them skillful trackers. Besides the *partisans* there are the *goumiers,* Arabs likewise not enlisted and not in uniform, but engaged for regular service usually for a period of two years and in connection with the camps.

II

Few cities are more renowned than Timbuctoo. Everywhere in the Western World the name is known and spoken as a symbol of remoteness beyond imagining. To be sure, not everyone knows that Timbuctoo is a city. Many think it a territory or a country, and many think it a myth. Still, it is famous. I am sure, on the other hand, that no locality so famous is quite so commonplace, so little striking in itself. There was a French book written some years ago, entitled: *Tombouctou la Mystérieuse.* The title went the name of the city one better in suggestion of remoteness and even of mystery.

The mere sound of it is evocative, like an incantation. To-day it serves to point a joke. You have not been long in the city before those who preceded you there greet you: "And how do you find Timbuctoo the Mysterious?" With a glance round and a shrug of the shoulders, everyone laughs.

There is much in the intimate life of the natives that the stranger does not see, or even the person who lives a long time there; but this is chiefly because he does not learn the language, or because he does not choose to associate with the black people. The native himself is rather friendly and hospitable than secretive. Naturally, he may look with suspicion upon the tax collector or the policeman, and will, of course, protect his own, on occasion, by devious and hidden ways; but there is quite as much, if not more, mystery behind the brick fronts of a block of rooming houses than there is behind the straw curtains that fall over the low doorways of Timbuctoo. In that ancient city, which is hardly more solid than the sands drifting like snow about it, one does not feel even the beat of primitive and savage passions, which stirs depths in our own selves as "mysterious" as anything in the world. And the black native is simple, not complicated. It is we who must seem mysterious, and fearful, to him.

But to the north of the town lies the great desert, and that was mysterious, at least to me; both in itself, the incomprehensible and limitless waste, with its stun-

ning miracles of light, and by reason of the people who lived in it and did not dwell in houses. You mount to your rooftop and look off to the north. Out of sight beyond the horizon the *partisans* are on the hunt; somewhere is a great caravan on the way, with an armed squadron in the van and another in the rear, and with outriders on watch against ambush in the dunes. Stories come in; there are tales from the past. You visit the French officials. They are debonair, but they are thoughtful, too. They laugh at your dreams of the Sahara. "The desert!" they say. "It's nothing but sand, with rocks and mountains here and there, and no water to speak of and damnably uncomfortable to have anything to do with."

And the Arabs who know it and who wander in it? The Frenchman's eye twinkles. "So you think them fascinating because they were nice to you during three months in Morocco, eh? And perhaps you think you know the Arabs, eh? Well, I have lived with the Arabs twenty years or more, and I know less to-day of the working of their minds than I ever knew."

And you learn something of the hard problem the Sahara is to these most fearless and most understanding of modern peoples. Not even the loyalty of the *partisans* is beyond question. Many a one with a priceless rifle slung from his saddle and plenty of ammunition, with tea and sugar and rice to last him a fortnight, is tempted to cast off his alliance with the repugnant Chris-

tians, for all it promises him a certain security, and recapture in the desert, his desert, after all, the ancient freedom of his race. And there may be the urge to carry his arms to some tribal feud, the sting of some misunderstanding.

These are not the Arabs of the cities, with wide commercial interests, with knowledge of banking and credit, even with affiliations with business houses in Europe. These are men of the desert, the nomads. The French have lived with them in distant oases; they know their language and their customs; they have fought against them and with them. If it were only a matter of a battle or two, how easy it would be. But no advantage of arms will ever quite do it. It is patience and tact, with the endless study of how to advance understanding. Disputes arise between two tribes, for example, or between factions of one tribe, which threaten widespread unrest and worse. Intervention alone can check them; yet how intervene, and how decide between contenders in such a way that one shall not feel himself wronged, and with that feeling, which rankles forever in an Arab's breast, depart to meditate revenge? And how avoid misunderstanding with a people whose stoicism and whose secrecy gave rise long ago to the belief that European and Arab never can understand each other? And granted a perfect understanding each of the other, how many differences remain between them which are perhaps fundamentally irreconcilable?

III

Nothing threw the uncertain problem so clearly in relief before my ignorance as a story—a true story, by the way—at least, true enough.[1] In the days before the French occupation there were several powerful Arab families in Timbuctoo, and the head of one of these was, so to speak, chief of all the Arabs in the region. Among his rights was that of exacting toll for each camel laden with merchandise coming into the markets of the town. The reigning chief at the time of the occupation was a rich Arab named El Hassim. He had two sons, Omar and Ali. The new Government was slow to break up customs so anciently established and El Hassim was allowed to collect his toll without interference. But certain Arab merchants were quick to see that this custom would one day go by the board; and one of these, Abdeslam, scarcely less rich and influential than El Hassim himself, brought the matter to an issue. He refused to pay toll to El Hassim on a caravan of his camels come into town.

Now, El Hassim sent his son, Omar, to collect the toll. There was a bitter dispute, in which Abdeslam's son, Hamed, killed El Hassim's son, Omar. The French intervened, brought Hamed to trial, and sentenced him

[1] My first hearing of it was through a missionary, interpreting it as it fell from the lips of a black man, of whom we had asked what were the so much talked of dangers of the desert. He had known all the parties concerned and had lived in Timbuctoo during all the events. Later a French official corroborated the main facts, and finally an Arab told it again in full. The names I give are fictitious.

to life imprisonment. But El Hassim went before the commander and said:

"It is the law of my people that he who murders shall be put to death. Do you, therefore, kill Hamed, that the death of my son Omar shall be avenged."

The Government could hardly grant such a plea. And El Hassim said:

"If you are unwilling to kill Hamed, do not shut him up within the protection of your prison. Turn him free and we will do justice according to our custom."

Here again the Government could obviously make no concession.

"So be it," El Hassim declared. "I am no longer young, but this day I go out into the desert, and henceforth, so long as I live and so long as my blood lives in my children, no Christian shall cross the desert in safety from Timbuctoo, or any who go on your business, or any who ally themselves with you. That the death of my son may be avenged, it is war between you and me."

Having previously liquidated his fortune, he departed at once into the desert; but the French caught the son Ali before he could follow the father, and him they held as hostage.

Nothing very alarming happened. Either El Hassim was slow to gather adherents or he feared to open warfare while the French held Ali. And in time news came that the old man lay ill not far from Arrouan. He wrote and urged his son to obtain permission from the Government to come and see his father before he died.

This permission the Government refused. And in a few weeks came a more urgent message, with a plea for money and food. This time the Government sent special messengers to Arrouan, and they came back with the report that indeed El Hassim lay dying, deserted by his friends and his tribesmen. So the Government allowed Ali to depart on parole, and he did not return. For, it would seem, at the sight of his son, El Hassim rose from his bed, in full possession of his strength and his cunning and with nothing lost of his influence over his tribesmen. He began falling upon caravans and upon isolated posts. His raids and his attacks grew more and more daring. And Ali, his son, was his right-hand man.

At last, awaiting their chance, they swept down upon the *carré,* only eight hours from Timbuctoo, and massacred all the troops stationed there. Most of the band vanished into the desert again, but the French heard that Ali, possibly slightly wounded, was lying *perdu* not a great way off. They called in their *partisans* and bade them capture Ali and bring him in to the city, alive.

This, the *partisans* said, they could not do. Ali was the deadliest shot in all the country. He went always with two rifles. They would undertake to kill Ali, but no one could bring him in alive. However, such a conclusion would not suit the Government's plans. They insisted that the *partisans* set forth and capture Ali alive. So the *partisans* were provisioned and armed, and

they set forth, less mindful, it is said, of the danger than doubtful of the possibility of accomplishing what the Government was requiring of them.

In due time they picked up Ali's tracks. It is marvelous what these men can read in the sands, which to one of us appear shifting and trackless as the sea. By the marks it was plain that he was alone. Following them, they came to the water hole where Ali got his supply, but did not wait for him there, knowing that they could never thus take him alive. Four of them went on cautiously till late in the afternoon they sighted Ali's camp. They could see him sitting on a mat by his blankets, his rifles at hand, his camel lying on the sands near by. So they returned to their own camels, which they had left hidden among the dunes, and abandoning there their rifles and their ammunition belts—everything, in fact, but the garments they wore—empty-handed and defenseless they came out into Ali's sight and approached him with lifted hands.

"We are merchants," they said, "who have been robbed."

Ali received them and gave them tea to drink, but never was off his guard.

Then came the sunset, with the western sky aflame over the sands and the eastern sky an unfathomable blue, and all the air like some crystalline wine—the time of that imperceptible and flawless dissolving of light into color and of color into the deep clarity of night, at which hour the Mohammedan turns towards Mecca to

pray. The four *partisans* asked for water for their ablutions, and when they had washed, Ali looked at them searchingly and said, "It is indeed the hour of prayer." And he spread his turban as a rug on the sand. Two of the partisans faced the east beside him, one on either hand; and the other two stood a little behind him, one to the right and the other to the left. And as they knelt to pray, Ali laid down his rifles, and the two *partisans* just behind quietly seized them while Ali prayed.

It is said that when the young man stood up and knew what had been done, he looked at the *partisans* and said: "It is the will of God. But that God had willed it, not you, or any men living, should have taken me." Without more ado, and even without their binding him, he went with them to French headquarters. The mellow black man from whom I first heard this story had known the *partisans* who had captured Ali thus alive; and he said they were far prouder of Ali's spirit than they were of their own feat. For this they expressed no shame. Such is Fatalism. If it was written that Ali should be captured, then it was written that they should capture him.

But El Hassim sent a messenger to the French.

"Give me back my son and I will make peace with you on any terms. Only give me back my son." For the Arab lives in his sons more than we can appreciate. At the time of my stay in Timbuctoo, this had just been done, or was about to be done. At any rate, the raids that year were the work of *rezzous* out from the Rio

de Oro; and it was with these *rezzous,* I learned later, and not with the men of El Hassim's adherence, that the salt caravan had fought two rear-guard skirmishes on the way in.

Such a story, and one hears many of them along the edge of the Sahara, seems essentially tragic; for it tells of misunderstanding springing from the conflict of two races, which no amount of goodwill and of high-intentioned effort can prevent; most tragic of all in that it is rooted in what may be best in both.

IV

During four or five weeks after my arrival I saw practically no Arabs at all in Timbuctoo. I looked forward to the coming of the caravan which would bring so many to town, with growing desire to lay eyes on them, on men truly of the Sahara, but with little hope of ever coming to know any of them. Then, quite unexpectedly and some time before the arrival of the caravan, overhearing two men talking Arabic behind me in the store, I turned and found myself before two real Arabs. Here were no Moors in dirty blue, scraping up pennies as they could, but two men, graceful and alert, with the dust of the desert on their brows and lashes, and on the hair that escaped from their turbans. Their white tunics were powdered with dust, and their yellow knee boots were all grayed over. They responded to my greeting with the flashing smile characteristic of their

race, and they spoke a few words to me which I understood.

One was tall and, if I may say so, electrifying. He had aquiline features and great dark eyes which flashed and darkened, a daredevil if ever I saw one. The other was far more approachable, less fierce, probably, though also more clever. They were *goumiers.* Their rifles stood against the wall, and their tunics bulged with the cartridge belt. They had, in fact, just arrived on their camels from the *carré,* whence they had set forth in the middle of the previous night, on no more Saracen errand than that of fetching the mail.

To my surprise, early the next morning they came to my house with a third Arab, and we had tea. We tried to talk, an effort foiled less by my ignorance than by the curiosity of him whom you could not but call the sheik. His eyes spotted everything visible in the room, down to the details of my costume. His blazing smile was directed to burn out of me the concession of everything he saw. He was swift as lightning and quite as startling. I had not suspected that there was so much that was unconsumable in my property sense; but I felt it was a question of give all or nothing; and though my sense of hospitality, Arabicized already, prompted me to give all, a vision of myself not only homeless but naked in the streets fortified my stinginess. His so fiery "Give!" met a dull asbestos "No." We laughed heartily all the time; and so, though I cannot think him disinterested, I do believe he flashed and burned a great deal

out of curiosity and the love of fun. They soon went, and the sheik never returned; but Ibrahim, his comrade, paid me another visit that afternoon.

After the tea, which Ibrahim, free lance though he was, brewed as only the Arabs can do, as if it were at once a homely treat and a tiny solemn ritual, he asked for my washbasin, which he had seen hanging on the wall, for the soap, which he had taken up from the dish and smelled, and for more hot water; and then and there fell to washing himself, his face, his ears, his hair, his hands, scrubbing himself with a parental thoroughness, and groaning with pain and rapture at the same time. When he started to dry himself with the folds of his robe, especially to dig the soap out of his ears, I could not but fetch him a towel. He looked at me a moment with radiant wet face, thanked me truly from the heart, laid the towel carefully beside him on the mat, and went on drying himself with his robe.

That was a good towel gone. Ibrahim never suspected its use. He never doubted that it was some strange gift, ineptly presented, but with free heart. When he had dried his face and hands he folded the towel almost lovingly in his turban. Then he took the basin, the kettle, and the soap, and went off to some unused room in the house and doubtless had a good scrub all over, while the towel lay dry in his turban. It was a good big bath towel, and it seemed a pity, now that he owned it so indisputably, that he should not use it. He told me later he would take it to his wife, and I

IBRAHIM

often wondered if she knew any more than he what the thing was intended for. I doubt it, since she must have had less to do with Europeans than he had had.

For it was plain to see that, though Ibrahim did not recognize a bath towel when it was tendered him, he was familiar with Europeans. He was at ease, regarding me with a look in which some shrewdness was mingled with a great deal of good-natured challenge; and when I spoke to him, he listened like some one who knew that I was not speaking French or some Christian gibberish, but trying to speak his own tongue. But early the next morning he came round with a young man who was grave and smiling and who, when I spoke to him in Arabic, regarded me with somber reserve until I had finished, then quietly turned to Ibrahim to ask him what I had said. His short tunic was worn and soiled, his bare legs and his arms grimy with dirt, the curly masses of his dark hair full of sand. Apart from this, one noticed at first only that he was tall and slender, with a reserve of manner and voice which was both shy and deep. I had no doubt that this man had spoken seldom with a European before. It was Boya, Ibrahim's young brother.

Of course we had tea, but Ibrahim was impatient over it and hurried it and hardly waited for us to finish before he fetched, himself, the basin, filled it with warm water, and set it before his brother on the mats. Seeing what was on the way, I gave him soap, but no towel, and stood aside to watch them. Boya washed very cau-

tiously chiefly his hands, over and over again, till Ibrahim urged him to other areas and bolder movements, giving him vigorous example. The water was soon black as ink, and when they had both got soap in their eyes, I took advantage of their blindness to fetch a basin of clean water. This, in spite of their simple protests, I did several times. They were more careful of water than many are of wine, and splashed hardly a drop on the mats. You could not watch them sitting thus cross-legged with the basin between them, and not feel in a new and vivid way how scarce water is in the Sahara, after all. And all the time, not only Ibrahim, but his brother as well, kept saying, "This is good; no water in the desert, no water in the desert."

In France there is a monastery of most learned and hospitable monks, with whom I once went to spend a fortnight. One of the fathers, who came to lead me to the first meal, explained to me on the way: There will be a little ceremony to pass through at the entrance to the refectory. In olden times, when a traveler arrived at the monastery to bide the night with us— it is in our order to be hospitable—the abbot received him and, in token of humility and service, washed the stranger's hands and feet. In these days of easy traveling and plenty of water, this custom would rather embarrass than comfort the stranger, but we have always kept a little trace of it. At the door of the refectory the abbot will come to meet you and will pour water over your hands in symbol of the ancient practice.

It happened as he had said. The abbot came swiftly forward, and taking a beautiful silver urn from the hands of a novice beside him, poured water from it over my hands, which fell into a beautiful silver basin held by another young monk; and a third wiped my hands with a towel of fine linen. It was exquisitely strange; but how incomparably stranger to have come thousands of miles into a remote land and find, seated on the floor of my room, with a cheap enameled basin between them, two brothers of a race hostile to mine washing their hands and faces, and myself throwing out the swiftly blackened water and fetching clean—though not in the least out of humility, this service, but because conditions demanded more water than they perhaps would presume I could spare.

It was during this proceeding, utterly unceremonious, that I noticed the beauty of Boya's head and face. It was in the line and expression of it rather than in the features. An artist might have found a stronger, rougher word for it than beauty. Even seated thus, he would have made a finer young David than any I have ever seen painted.

Alfa arrived in time to interpret for me Ibrahim's farewell speech, which was fiery and undoubtedly sincere for the moment. As my house had been his, so would his tent or his hut be mine; and as I had received him as a friend, so would he and his wife and his brother and all his family receive me, wherever we might meet. These, he said, were not vain words, for they were

spoken in the hearing of Allah, and it was already written that he was my friend. So they went, and I scarcely expected to see them again. But later I did see Boya for a moment; and when I returned to Timbuctoo, Ibrahim was in town and came to see me. He was awaiting an official investigation over his killing two Daggars at some remote spot in the desert; and since he was not held in detention, the officials must have been inclined to believe his story of the affair. At all events, he took me out to his hut, presented me to his wife, gave me tea. The wife was most evidently going to have a baby before long. She pointed to herself and said, "That is Ibrahim's doing," with a fine implication of both blame and praise. She gave me a leather cushion, and he gave me a basket covered with leather, both handsome; and I, being by then wise in the ways of the country, gave her a scarf and him ten francs. I did not see the towel.

V

At last the caravan arrived. We had word the night before that it would come in the morning, and the town was up early, with most of us on the rooftops looking to the northern rim of the desert for the first sight of it. It was a gray morning, the only one we had had. The more I looked at the distant rim of sand, the less I saw; but Omar insisted he saw a low, minute whirl of dust somewhere out there. Maybe he did; but what brought us down was the sight of people streaming out

from the city across the dunes. In the street I chanced to fall in with one of the missionaries, who had come down from his rooftop for the same reason as mine—because the crowd was hurrying out into the desert, not because he thought the caravan really near.

There was a big dune perhaps half a mile from the city, and we started to scramble up this with the intention of getting a view into the distance. When some one shouted, "They are coming," we hastened the more, so as to see them come in from far off; and then there was a general shout, "Here they are!" And there they were, the vanguard on white camels coming round the edge of the very dune, not a stone's throw away.

It seemed an incredible materialization out of nothing; and when we had run to it, it still seemed to come out of nothing, endlessly, and out of nowhere. For the dunes are higher than you think and the camels smaller than you remembered them, and the line came winding in through the hollows, quite hidden from anyone standing even on a fairly high dune till it emerged into view a few hundred feet away. Besides this, the camels are of the same tawny dun color as the sands, and at any distance cease to be defined against them, even in movement. So vast was the scene itself, that if a string of camels went along the crest of a dune—and many did so, bearing off from the main caravan and going west towards Gundam—they were outlined against the sky much as aphides on the stalk of a plant.

Even more remarkable, one might well say even more

astounding, than the absence of everything spectacular, was the silence. Following one another in a close double line, often attached to one another, the camels walked on steadily past us without any shouts from their drivers. The fall of their soft padded feet was muffled in the sand, not a thud, not a scuff; and save for the singularly unpleasant grunts which are their own discourse—and they were too weary to do much grunting—the only sound was the tinkle of the slabs of salt slung in pairs over their humps. So that, did a man turn his back on that caravan, he lost it altogether, while it streamed on not fifty feet behind him. Thus, finding it so vague and so silent, I came to believe what I had so often heard—that if you are journeying with a caravan across the desert and lie asleep through the departure from the night's camp, small are the chances that you will ever overtake it.

The camels were very lean and their humps flabby, and many had the big infected sores to which the beast is liable and which no care can prevent. There was many a young foal born on the way, scampering along beside its mother, bleating for the breakfast which would not stay still for it.

Camels in this part of the world are not very strong, and four slabs of salt, say two or three hundred pounds, make a load beyond which you may begin to count in the proverbial and much dreaded straws. Therefore, the majority of the men, drivers and traders alike, were on foot and doubtless had come so for many days. The

THE CARAVAN ARRIVES

stride of these barefoot men through the sand appears tireless. Faces were shrunk with fatigue and parched, covered with dust, as were arms and legs and tunics, but no shoulder stooped and no foot dragged. Their step was light and swift, and they were continually tossing some fold of robe or sleeve back over their shoulders, to move with yet freer grace. Some were mounted on riding camels, and these often rode out to the side and from the top of some slight mound of sand watched the caravan go by, travel-worn but picturesque beyond words to tell. And some met friends, even here outside the city.

On the line moved, with no hastening but so steadily that one lost count altogether. There seemed no end to what trailed itself into sight from behind the dunes, passed us, went up the light rise between us and the city, and out of sight again, without ever a break in the so slender and so unimpressive double line. And the markers stood on the roof of the house with the tower which was by the edge of the city and kept tally; and we knew later that more than three thousand camels came in with salt that day to Timbuctoo.

In the narrow streets you were dodging camels the rest of the day; and there, between the walls, they seemed anything but small. You could not wander far without having to squeeze yourself against some door to let camels with scornful heads, no matter how flabby the hump, go by.

There was never a sign of haste, yet the camels were

unloaded before the sun was low. Along the main track they followed into the heart of the town there might have been laid a number of invisible switches, whereby smaller or larger files of them were diverted into some side street, which they followed until the driver stopped them before an open door. Out of the door stepped the merchant and his friends. For a moment there were greetings; but almost without delay the camels were brought one by one to their knees and the slabs of salt carefully detached from them; after which they rose to their feet and were led or driven off. Here, there, and everywhere you came across little piles of accouterments, camel cloths, leather sacks, kettles, and little boxes, and laid carefully on edge against the pile several bars of salt, which resembled nothing so little as salt, and nothing so much as discarded mantelshelves of yellowed marble. Formerly, more than at present, the Arabs used to carve little caskets and curios out of broken slabs, which looked as if they were carved in alabaster.

In the course of the day the salt was taken into houses, whence later, presumably, it was sold in wholesale lots. I remember seeing very little of it in the market at retail, though now and again you would come upon a black man sawing a bar with a coarse saw, his robe laid prudently underneath to catch the fragments and even the sawdust. Thus you could buy a slice of salt, so to speak, which is convenient to carry if you are traveling, and for a piece of which you may acquire

almost anything you need from the natives along the river. In Timbuctoo, the natives seemed to buy it most commonly broken up in pebbles, like what we call rock salt. The only powdered salt I saw for sale was imported.

All the afternoon the camels were taken down to the pool to drink. How long it may have been since they had drunk before, I do not know, but their thirst or their capacity for water was prodigious. The camel comes right to the margin of the pool, very careful not to wet his feet; he calls into action some strange muscles which lower his head by means of his neck till his lips touch the surface of the water. Contact between the water and his inner reservoir being thus established, and without a ripple or a splash, he maintains it for at least five minutes. Nothing visible about him moves, not even his tail. You cannot believe he is drinking, for you see not the faintest disturbance on the surface of the water near his lips, or the contraction of muscles along his neck; and I would take anybody's word for it that he has some queer sort of syphon contrary to nature. After five minutes the derrick moves again. The head comes up from the water, and so economical is the creature that not a drop falls even from his muzzle, twitch his lips though he will. He looks round in a detached sort of way, while doubtless closing one inner reservoir and opening another, and then begins as from the beginning. It is not at all an ungainly process; if it is not mechanical it is stately, especially at sunset time, when

he adorns the scene more beautifully than ever tourist folders painted him.

Being full of water, he is taken off to pasture, to the extensive grove of thorn shrubs and thorn trees known as the forest of Kabara; where during weeks afterwards you will catch a glimpse of him with his head lifted on the long neck to the topmost branches, for all the world a dinosaur. How his vast and mobile yet velvety lips can peel leaves and tiny blossoms from twigs bristling with thorns as long and as hard as needles, is a secret between him and his Maker. But feed he does, and on such forbidden food. His hump fattens and stands up like a regular hump; his sores heal; and he is ready to work again.

So the great caravan came with salt to Timbuctoo; and though I had seen many glad meetings in the streets during the day, there was no celebration at night. Imagine a thousand cowboys come to town after a round-up and all the racket, or a crew of sailors on shore leave. But there was not that night in Timbuctoo one sight or sound of merrymaking, but only the same byways in which you met scarcely a soul afoot, and the same market place under the starlight, early vacant save for the lone watchman playing his flute by the fire. So it was the next night and the next; therefore it could not be because of weariness that the thousand and more Arabs who had come in with the caravan were not carousing and making the welkin ring. No; such is simply not their habit. You could find them, if you wished to,

UNLOADING CAMELS

seated in wide circles on the sand outside the city, rather vague for all the clarity of the stars, talking and laughing in low voices, and at peace. Now and again two or three would set off in the direction of the huts where, doubtless, women were; and now and then a group might come out across the sands from the town, laughing over an easy conquest, or bargain, in love. But it was all so softly done and with such fine animation; and you fell to wondering if this was merely, after all, because they do not drink or get drunk, or if there was something in them attuned to the silence of the spaces they inhabit, which was not given to noise.

Chapter VII: The Son of Lehsen

I

ONE AFTERNOON, COMing out from the store into the blinding sunlight, I stumbled on a group of Arabs. So far as my dazzled eyes could see, all, except a ragged youngster who had often greeted me in the street and who, not really of the group, was but hanging round the edge of it, were strangers to me. But hearing this urchin address me in Arabic, and hearing my clumsy attempts to reply to him in the same language, the men took an interest and, gathering round, tested me with one phrase after another till we were all laughing together. The confusion would have been hopeless but for the aid of one man, who, I gradually became aware, had taken a place close to me, and who, by speaking slowly and clearly, could make me understand. Naturally, I turned more and more often to him, and so he became the one clear personality in the group.

He was a young man, still beardless, somewhat fairer of skin than most of the Arabs of the region, without turban, though his hair was clipped close and the sun

was blazing down. His gaze, very steady, was undarkened by the slightest shadow of suspicion or distrust. On the contrary, there was a light in his eyes which the Arabs call golden, and which I had seen before only in the eyes of men drugged with keef, who are dreamers and great story-tellers. His animation denied any possibility of his being drugged, and I do not know whether that luster was owing to the way the sunlight fell on his eyes, or to their color, which, in keeping with his complexion, was lighter than the deep, somber brown of those of his companions. I did not recall at the moment, when I was trying to talk Arabic with real Arabs, the topaz glints in the eyes of the Berber Touaregs. Well, this was Mohammed ould Lehsen—that is, Mohammed son of Lehsen. Of who Lehsen was I had not the remotest idea; or of the story of Lehsen's father, or of the pleasant relationship which was in store for me with Mohammed his son.

There was one sentence I could say in Arabic with the certainty of its being understood, and that was: "Come to my house and we'll drink tea." It was not that I pronounced it without foreign accent, but that the ears of the Arabs are quite open to such an invitation. For tea is more to the Arabs than beer to the Germans, or even wine to the French; not tea as we drink it, but tea brewed with pounds of sugar in the pot, and perhaps sprays of mint, sipped steaming hot from small glasses, with profound gratitude to Allah. So I pointed to my house nearby, and said: "Come to

my house when you will, all of you, and we'll drink tea."

Mohammed came that very afternoon, bringing with him another young man, also Mohammed, who brewed tea excellently well, which we three drank, sitting round the pot on the floor. After that we sat in chairs at the table, where they taught me, laughing heartily, to say many words of the kind most of us the world over learn very young and never speak in drawing-rooms. At least, I suspect they were of that vigorous kind, though, unhappily, I could never find out the meaning of them.

When Mohammed caught sight of the typewriter his mood changed suddenly. He fingered it timidly, startled when a type bar moved. After a while he said with the utmost earnestness: "I want to learn to read and write French. Will you teach me?" Of course I said yes, and quite lightly, for I never dreamed but that it was a momentary curiosity about the machine which had created the ambition in him, and that the first struggle, even with the letters of our alphabet would exhaust his patience. But he insisted on having the alphabet typed then and there; and while the other Mohammed, having taken to the floor, leaned dozing against the wall, the son of Lehsen mastered the mystery of shift keys and copied many times the alphabet which had been typed for him.

However I doubted his patience, I soon ceased to have the slightest doubt of his intelligence. I do not re-

member even having told him that the typed capital letters corresponded to the letters on the keys of the machine; yet this relationship is far less self-evident than you might think, unless you bore in mind that the machine itself was not stranger or more complex to that young man than the lines and crosses and curves in the twenty-six combinations which are the letters of our alphabet. For Mohammed knew not the sound of one single French word, much less the look of any of the letters which spell it. Later I suspected, and later still was given good reason to believe, that he had not only never been in the house of a European before, but had never willingly spoken with one.

Unerringly, his eye discovered the key which fitted the letter. Never did his finger hover. He kept his hands tight between his knees, and looked from the copy to the keyboard and back until he had found the proper correspondence; then only, and without hesitation, tapped the key. If I tried to help him, he waved me aside. As he learned to recognize the form of the letters, he learned the order in which they had been written for him; and that very afternoon put the copy aside and began typing the alphabet unaided.

Meanwhile, I was so fascinated by the intensity of his study as not to notice that the light reflected in from the terrace had softened through amber to violet and to clear gray. The sun had set. As I watched him, wondering if he would now remember the N which must follow the M, abruptly, without a word or look

to me, he stood up and, going swiftly to the dozing Mohammed, took his hand, and they went together from the room. It seemed strange that he should so rise out of his work without warning and silently. I wondered if they had stayed later than they had meant to stay, what sort of engagement they might have forgotten. But when in a minute or two I went on the terrace, I discovered that they had not left the house. Facing the east, where the first stars shone, unconscious of me, they were standing side by side, erect, with uplifted heads; and I did not wait to see them kneel on the turban spread before their feet or strain my ears to catch the low sound of their voices in prayer, but stole back to light the lantern in the darkened and spiritless room.

Presently Mohammed returned to the typewriter, as swift and as silent as he had gone from it, and as if there had been no interruption, typed the alphabet to the end. In this final essay he had made but the small error of putting the T before the S, and with a smile he promised that that should not occur again. He then took a pencil, and over each letter wrote down the name and sound of it in Arabic letters. So the first step was taken in his firm and never once weakened determination to learn to read and write French in a few days, a determination which, it may be fairly said, was not defeated.

No difficulty put him off, not even perhaps the most serious one of my own ignorance of the language in

which perplexities could have been explained to him. He came every day and sometimes twice and sometimes three times a day, and little by little the list of words grew. It began with "camel," how well I remember; but soon twisted into the household and picked up "tea" and "sugar" and "milk" and "water," "yours" and "mine," "there is" and "there is not"; until, before a week was gone, he could read such sentences as: "I am very hungry." "Is there bread in your house to give me to eat?" "Yes, there is bread in my house, and if you are thirsty I will give you tea to drink with lots of sugar in it." And he could write such phrases on dictation.

Had I been able to speak Arabic fluently with Mohammed, I would have argued to dissuade him from his purpose, not wholly to convince him, perhaps, but to open his eyes. So long as he was unable to speak a Western language, he was in that measure protected from Western influences and the corruption which everywhere follows them; not such lamentably simple failings as drunkenness and debauchery, which our civilization merely aggravates, but more subtle contaminations of mind and spirit—in a phrase, from all the sophistry by which we convince ourselves, for convinced we seem to be, that we are nobler than other races, while we are surely only more grasping. As for his broadening his understanding by a look into Western history and Western literature, we have taught foreign languages in our schools and universities for generations,

yet recent catastrophes seem to prove that we are unable to arrive at a comprehension of a point of view so little different from our own as the Teutonic or the Latin through any study yet defined. By learning French or English or German, Mohammed could perhaps do business more directly with Europeans who were developing his country commercially and make, or lose, more money; but this was not worth risking the freedom of his spirit for. At any rate, we are constantly warned against dabbling in the East, against subjecting ourselves to its manifold seductions, and is the warning all to be on one side? Is there nothing in the West against which to warn the East?

Mohammed's spirit was dauntless and free, and his will could not have easily been changed. If I regret my inability to have talked with him thus, it is because I missed thereby the answers his keen intelligence would have found.

The gestures and pantomimes we had to devise to make ourselves clear to each other, meanwhile, were a greater tax on our minds than the purely linguistic efforts; yet such a jolly one that, but for Mohammed's steadfast determination, we might have lost more time in laughter than ever we did in being truly balked. My triumph was with the word "donkey," for I startled myself with the verisimilitude of my hee-haw and Mohammed laughed aloud a moment, and Boujma rocked back and forth on the floor, and even the sulky Abdullah smiled. Together we worked out mule, with a hee-

haw for a father, a whinny for mother, and a crying infant for the newborn mule. We were stuck but once, and that when he asked me how to say, "What is it?" I did not know the paraphrase common among these Arabs for the question, "What is it?" and so, when Mohammed went round the room picking up this and that and saying "Sh'no," or "Sh'nu," or something like that, and Boujma picked up one mat after another and said "Sh'no," or "Sh'nu," and Abdullah bent over me and looking deep into my eyes, exploded "Sh'nu," I failed utterly to grasp what they were driving at.

II

Boujma and Abdullah were men whom Mohammed had brought to the house, and who came frequently. The former, older than the others, had not the appearance of a man of the country, and did indeed come from that part of Morocco just south of the Atlas. He was a dark man, handsome of feature, always heavily turbaned in blue, but rather lighter spirited than his appearance led you to expect. He was stranded in Timbuctoo; for on the way here across the desert with two other merchants and a small caravan of dates, he had been attacked by a *rezzou* and robbed of everything. I have never been clear as to what happened to his companions, though I think they were not killed; but Boujma himself had wandered two days afoot without water, and three without food, before being rescued.

He would come often for tea, and after we had drunk the tea would eat all the tea leaves; but rather, I fancy, because he liked the taste of them than because he was still starving. He would sit hours against the wall while Mohammed worked at his French.

Abdullah was jealous and difficult. He was stupid, also; and I say it with little regret, because when he tried to learn to read and write and failed to master more than the alphabet, if ever he mastered that, he said it was because I did not know Arabic.

Strangely enough, I learned more about Boujma and Abdullah than I ever learned about Mohammed, though he was the closest and surest friend I ever made in Timbuctoo. We never happened to speak of the caravan, but I know he came in with it. After he had gone and it became certain I should not see him again, Abdullah, who, though a native of Arrouan, spent several months of the year in Timbuctoo, said: "You may leave any messages for Mohammed with me. When he returns, he will come at once to see me, for he has left his salt in my house."

Where he lived, and whence he had come in with the caravan, I do not know. I tried to ask him about his family. He told me that his father was dead, that he had been shot by raiders; and the gesture of his arm, which summoned up vividly the scene of a man encircled by his attackers, gave me the impression that the tragedy had occurred at some place far off in the desert, where no man could hope for aid. His mother was still living,

together with three of his brothers and himself. Where? In the desert. His white robe, though full, was simple; and there was in his dress no suggestion of even such elegance as marked that of the more urban Boujma and Abdullah. In the slender sheath wallet he wore hung from his neck on a fine leather cord, he carried, besides his money and a small knife, a flint and steel. He found the drinking water in my carafe, cooled only by evaporation, too chill to drink fast.

Once, looking at me intently, he said something about a relative of his and Christians. If his manner altered a little on that occasion, I felt it only as vaguely as I had understood what he had said, which was vague as idiocy. Thus his disclosure of a terrible event met with the fatuous smile of a person who has hardly an idea of what has been said and who babbles, "Ah, yes, is that so?" which is no response at all.

At this time there used to come to the house an Arab whose idea of his own importance was only less extreme than his actual servility. On coming for the first time to see me, he said: "I am chief of all the Arabs in the region." [He was a simpering little monkey of a man.] "I can do a great deal for you. They tell me many Arabs come to your house, but they are ordinary. Now that I have come, all that is to be changed. A noble white man like you shall receive only noble Arabs in his house. This does not concern you, but me, who will arrange everything. I am going to be married soon and will invite you to the wedding, an honor which

rarely befalls Christians. You will, of course, make some little gift to the girl. I suggest a scarf, not a cheap one, you understand, but one of the best quality."

As a matter of fact, this man, Bouka, held some small job under the Government, something to do with buying provisions for the *partisans*. I suspect the other Arabs disliked him. He would come often to my house, sighing with the fatigue of his heavy labors, complaining of headache, announcing that he would close the door of the house to all Arabs except the lordly chiefs, whom he was always going to summon, and reminding me that I was to buy for his girl a scarf of the best quality, which, by the way, I never did. One afternoon he came while Mohammed and Abdullah were there. Promptly, and with a marked sneer, he said in French: "I know that ould Lehsen. Why do you waste your time with him? He is an ignoramus. He comes from the bush." This was equivalent to saying that Mohammed was a country lout. However ill-natured these remarks, they confirmed my belief that Mohammed was a pure desert product.

It is curious, considering how little I really knew of Mohammed and how difficult it was for us to communicate, that he stands more sharply defined as a personality than any other Moslem or Christian I met in Timbuctoo. Everything about him was clear-cut, his features, his conduct, his purposes, in so far as I was informed of them. Those of my own color who chanced to call when Mohammed was there, invariably took no-

tice of him and kept of him the same impression as I had, which is the more remarkable in view of the fact that with his close-clipped hair and his perfectly simple garments, he had not the striking picturesqueness of other Arabs.

How he regarded me I can scarcely know, save that it was without distrust; but by his confidence alone, so often implied though he had reason to withhold it from any Christian, I felt from the first honored.

On the second or third morning of his visits he showed me an ugly wound just below his knee, the wide gash from a stone on which he had fallen in some rocky part of the desert, already grievously inflamed. In his keen eyes I read clearly: "Your people are full of hatred towards my people; you and I are friends. I trust you to do what you can for this." We bathed it in a solution of permanganate freshly prepared, and bandaged it; and every day up to the time of his departure we repeated the treatment. No detail escaped his notice, either in the condition of the wound, which was slow to heal, or in the steps taken to cure it. Every day there was the same sharp question in his eyes: "Do you agree with me that it is better?" but I never saw in them any sign that his confidence, once placed, no matter how ignorantly, was withdrawn.

Late one afternoon he brought a man to the house, whom he introduced as his brother Hassim, just arrived from the desert. Hassim was taller than Mohammed, who was himself tall, older, swarthier, lightly bearded,

but with the same close-clipped hair and something of the same steady look in his eyes. He was dressed in a short blue tunic, very dusty, as well it might be after his long ride in over the sands. One of his cheeks was slightly swollen and he was evidently, for all his stoicism, in pain. Without any loss of time, Mohammed made his brother kneel, and pointed out to me three deep gashes in his scalp. Hassim, he explained, had been thrown from his camel in a stony place. By this time Mohammed knew that my judgment in such things was no more authoritative than his own; he knew that my faculty for treating wounds was no more highly developed than his, that I merely happened to have bandages and disinfectants. And so he himself prepared everything, supervised the treatment with the watchfulness of a modern surgeon, and put in a touch here and there with a hand lighter and far more skillful than mine.

He, and Hassim likewise, were far less worried over the ugly gashes in the scalp than they were over the slight scratch round which the cheek was swollen and to which I allotted no more than a daub of iodine. I knew that terrible infections may follow the bite of a camel; but both men insisted that this scratch was not from the camel's teeth, but from a thorn or a sharp pebble in the sand. I belittled their anxiety and conceded only another daub of iodine. On the next morning they came early, and the whole side of Hassim's face was shockingly swollen, hard, and hot as fire.

What one might do in the desert in such an emergency

is one thing; the only thing for a layman to do, with a modern dispensary not a mile away, was to keep his hands off such a wound and take the man to the doctor. But there was as little chance of leading Hassim to the Christian doctor as there was of prevailing upon him to eat pig. Mohammed and he, therefore, found me sadly wanting.

Now, Hassim, seeing the small steel mirror on the wall, went and took it down and, seating himself on the floor again beside his brother, studied his swollen face. The sight struck both him and Mohammed as laughable. The object of his scrutiny then seemed to change, for he took to pulling his light beard and his mustache and eyeing himself from various angles. The two brothers said a few things rapidly to each other, and Mohammed, without a word to me, fetched the small pair of scissors which had cut thread and paper and films and Alfa's finger nails and Ibrahim's mustache and were proportionately dull and dirty. With these and the mirror, Hassim retired to the terrace, ostensibly to trim his whiskers.

To my every plea, during Hassim's absence, that Mohammed should take his brother to the doctor, he answered, "To-morrow, to-morrow." Then Hassim returned, and it was plain at a glance that he had not trimmed his beard, but had gouged a hole in his cheek, from which matter was still oozing. It was a small hole, but it had opened up a pocket in the cheek as extensive as a silver 'dollar, which, as we squeezed it, sucked in

and drove out air like a bellows. The swelling was much reduced and he seemed relieved of pain.

Mohammed instantly took charge of the dressing. He asked for hot water in the basin, and broke a bit of the permanganate tablet into it. He took matches and with the small knife he carried in his wallet whittled down the ends, round which he wound bits of gauze, making perfect swabs. Then, when he had sat himself cross-legged on the floor, with the basin and swabs at hand, he called to his brother to lie down, which Hassim did, his whole great length along the floor and his head on Mohammed's knee; and Mohammed bent over that dark head with the same intensity of purpose with which he had set to learning the alphabet, and with a swift, unfaltering hand washed out the wound and left in it a small wick. During this time nobody spoke, and nobody heeded, perhaps, the clear colorless light which came from over their desert through the north window of my room and fell upon a scene so profoundly human and so strange. And I remember wondering if, despite all the modern science of medicine and surgery on which we Westerners so fearfully depend, one of us wounded in the desert might not trust himself without reserve to Mohammed. Hassim never came again, unwilling, perhaps, to risk being taken to the doctor; but Abdullah reported that the cheek had healed in a day and that Hassim, his business done, had returned to the desert.

Somewhat later, Mohammed brought his two older

brothers to see me. They were tall dark men, with masses of black curls which set off the beauty of their brows and eyes, and silken beards which did not hide their lips; and they were humbly dressed in dark-blue tunics. One was called Ismail, and the other Ibrahim, and they sat down by the wall just where the light would fall upon them, immovable and reserved, yet responsive. On that same afternoon, the two men who had come to find such debauched things in Timbuctoo as they had found elsewhere in the world, came to call while these two men from the desert were there with their brother, Mohammed; and one of them, who said he would have been an artist had he not failed at everything he put his hand to, looked hard at Ibrahim and said: "That is one of the noblest heads I have ever seen." And the other, after he had been silent a long while, cried out: "But you must tell about this. These are things to be told." Yet it was merely two men of the Sahara, who had never read a novel or ever been to the cinema or ever had their pictures taken, sitting on the mats against the wall, with their tea before them.

"Ask that big fellow there if he knows his way across the desert."

A little proud of my Arabic on this occasion, I asked Ibrahim if he knew his way from Timbuctoo to Colombe-Bechar. Ibrahim answered, simply: *"N'aarfhu"* ("I know it").

"Then, for God's sake, ask him how he knows it."

And when the question had been put to him, Ibrahim

answered, with a smile: "The sun by day, and by night the stars."

It was not many days after this that Bouka stopped me in the street.

"They have signaled a *rezzou* to the northwest. I am terribly busy, for I have to see to the supplies for the *partisans*. The Government is sending out seventy-five. Your ould Lehsen has got to go."

"When do they go?" I asked.

"Fifty this afternoon, the rest in the night."

He then told me he would know just when they left the barracks, and that if I should like to see them off, and that it was a sight to see, he would let me know the hour in time for me to watch them go out from the city and across the sands. Either because he had not the time, or because this was a disinterested offer, he did not mention the scarf that was to be of the best quality.

On returning to the house, I found Mohammed seated at the table, more serious than usual. Of course, I greeted him with a bluff cheerfulness intended to hide my true feelings, after the best Anglo-Saxon tradition, to which I have fallen heir. Mohammed remained serious.

"I am going away to-day," he said.

"Yes, yes, my boy,"—in a ringing voice. "Bouka told me."

He looked at me with curious earnestness.

"I am going away to-day. And when I return you will be gone."

"Yes, I know." But the silence which fell upon my lusty tones was a bit heavy; so, bustling round for bandages, I said: "Let's have a look at the knee."

The wound was now healing fast, and we were painting it each morning with iodine. He took a hand in the dressing, but seemed uninterested, preoccupied, very likely, with wondering whether I had failed again to understand him, or if I were really as indifferent to his departure as I seemed. When we were done, he picked up the bottle of iodine, in which there remained but very little, and ask if he might take it away with him into the desert. This was the only thing he ever asked me for.

On the previous day we had tackled writing in script. This was difficult for him, not only because of the shape of the letters, with their perplexing loops above and loops below the line, but because they must be hitched to one another from left to right, not, as in Arabic, from right to left. One or two sheets on the table were already covered with his efforts at writing by hand, which looked childish by comparison with the neat and accurate typing he had done. He showed me a few words, but with a lack of interest; and before we could set to work, he pushed the papers from him. They were ended, our studies together.

For a long time I had wished to take some snapshots of him, but foreseeing vague difficulties in the way of

it, had put off from day to day. Now, however, it could be put off no longer. A devout Mohammedan will not consent to make an image of man; and I am sure Mohammed had never seen before an instrument by which we do just that. I approached the matter as slowly and as carefully as I could. First I showed him snapshots of sailors, taken aboard the French cargo boat on which I had come to Africa. He studied them, but since he held them as often upside down as right side up, it is fair to say he made neither head nor tail of them. I then tried him with one or two of the room where we were sitting. I had developed these films myself, but so imperfectly that I had decided not to develop any more. Nevertheless, the prints were recognizably of aspects and furnishings of the room; and when he discovered this, putting his finger on some image in the picture and then pointing to the object itself in the room, we had made a definite advance.

I now delivered the camera to him, a very small one, which he handled cautiously as if it were some strange little firearm; and then by gestures persuaded him to believe in a harmless relationship between the instrument and the photographs. He overcame his suspicion to the extent of holding the camera pointed at his middle and only a few inches off, and repeatedly pressing the "trigger," and then peering through the back of it to see if he had caught a picture of himself. But for all this, it was not easy to lead him into the light of the terrace; and once there, it had all to be done over again,

and he must catch me in the finder and snap the deadly little thing at me several times before he would run the risk of letting me do the same to him. This timidity, rooted in a deep distrust, was not at all to be laughed at. On the contrary, I was not sure but it might change in a flash to hostility; and he was hardly more afraid of, than I was for, my camera, though he was trembling and I dancing round.

When we returned to the room, he demanded to see the pictures at once. I was very uneasy. Desperately as I forced my Arabic, it would not serve to explain the processes of development and printing; yet Mohammed insisted more and more impatiently on seeing the photographs. I finally made him understand, by showing him films and bottles of chemicals, that the roll in the camera had to be worked with a long while before pictures could be drawn from it; and then, as I thought prudently, explained that I meant to take the films to Dakar for development, which was what I truly intended, since I could not do the work myself. During the moment's thoughtfulness which this produced in him, I slipped the camera into its stout leather case and put it out of sight.

I had failed to reckon on Mohammed's extraordinary keenness. He picked up the pictures of the sailors.

"These," he asked, "were done in Dakar?"

"Yes," I answered.

"But this," he said, angrily, picking up a photograph

of my room, "was done here and not in Dakar. And you have the waters to do the work."

Suddenly, in my despair, I felt that he was angry, not for want of the photographs, but because he thought I was tricking him. I asked him to have faith in me. His anger vanished. And so that film, slipped in a tin cartridge and wrapped in a bandana handkerchief with others, went thousands of miles up and down the Niger River and over land and over sea, and was brought to Paris and bathed in acids and alkalies till everything was eaten from it save light and dark patches of gelatine; and these may throw a shadow on a square of paper in a strange likeness of Mohammed ould Lehsen and the wall of the terrace against which he stood.

He told me he should go either that afternoon or in the night, he did not yet know which; and that he would try to come to see me again before he left, but that he could not be sure. It was all quiet enough. He tore off a small strip of paper and, after a moment's thought, wrote on it something in Arabic; and though I did not understand it when he read it, nor understand what he said about it, I knew by his closing it up in my hand that it was to keep by me, not till we should meet again, which was a doubtful event, but always. His giving me the pencil was the hint for me to write a talisman for him, which I did, not unwilling to hope that it might stand him in stead as I believe his may stand me. For these things are simple and natural and may have some force,

His mind, so seldom unalert, seemed to wander a moment, but was brought back by the sight of several typewritten sheets, which, on his asking, I told him were a letter to my brother. Under the signature he wrote in Arabic a message to him, doubtless wishing him well. So it is with the Arabs; in greeting you they greet your kin. Whether it is more than a formality I do not know; but ties of blood are strong among them. Then, with the swift decision which was characteristic of him, he bade me good-by and went off about his preparations.

At five in the afternoon there was a pounding on my street door. It was Bouka, out of breath.

"Quick!" he cried. "They have left the barracks, and if you wish to see them, we must run for it."

We ran together westerly through the streets and debouched on the stretch of sand which lies between the city and the pool. Save for a water carrier or two, there was no sign of life.

"We are too late," Bouka panted. "They are gone."

But in a few minutes a small band of Arabs came walking out from the city, not far from us, and they were followed by a file of camels, each topped with the typical saddle, shaped not unlike certain stools found in Tut Ankhamen's tomb, and lightly laden with accouterments of one sort or another. We expected them to turn and pass by us on their way into the desert to the north; but instead of doing this, they crossed the stretch of sand straight west into the almost intolerable

brilliance of the descending sun. Seeing which, Bouka led on after them and I followed, with no idea of where we were bound, but wishing a last look at Mohammed if he should be among them.

They did not go fast, and we were soon at the tail of the hindmost camel, and twisting up and over a low dune among the huts and thorny hedges of one of the many villages which encircle the town. And the way over the soft sand led down by the margin of the pool, a little arm of the pool which makes in there, and the water in which looked vivid blue against the tawny sands, strikingly so in this land where the blue of the sky, except opposite the sunset in the east, is flattened with gray. Here the men paused, and while the camels went on beyond them, they washed their hands and faces in the water. The sight of them thus at their ablutions reminded one of how dusty and waterless a journey they were about to undertake.

Presently, in groups of two or three and hand in hand, they proceeded. We came up with the camels, waiting by some thorn trees. Near by stood a small building of beaten earth, inconspicuous but in a state of perfect repair. The Arabs, Bouka then informed me, do not go into the vast ancient mosques of the town; but, when they are setting forth on some expedition, come to this little place, their own and not the blacks', as to a shrine, here to pray and to invoke the protection of the saint who watches over travelers in the desert. There it stood,

low among the dunes, hot and shadeless amidst the desolate thorn shrubs, somehow sacred.

When the men had gone in, Bouka, being restless, returned to town. I knew by now that Mohammed was not in this group. Whether he had gone with an earlier group or not, Bouka had been unable to tell me. I lingered near the camels, whose retching groans were the only sound in the sun-baked, lonely place. Their light loads fascinated me. Here was a blanket roll, there a bundle of garments, here a curious box, there a sack of rice; but from every saddle hung a short rifle, the butt of yellowish wood, the barrel of bright steel, and a smoked kettle.

Coming out from their devotions, the men did not delay. Hardly did they cast a glance at the camels. One of them, only, took the bridle rope of the foremost beast and so conducted the leisurely file. But the others went on afoot, swiftly through the sand, as they always walk, abreast and hand in hand, with never a look back. They went through the village and down to the level, then to the left and along the margin of the pool and on and on. Low behind the city hung the full moon, just risen, like a translucent disk of ice, faintly mottled as if the blue shone through it from the heavens beyond.

Sometimes, if you lie on the beach at sunset time near the level of the water, especially if the tide is out and many shallow waves are running in, you will see a faint, delicately tinted luminousness over the whole shore. A spray, too fine to show of itself, pervaded by

the level rays of the sun, has, as it were, absorbed light and faintly glows as if it were light-giving. So it is with the sand dust of the desert, the dust of a sand so fine that it runs through your fingers like water; only the dust is more refulgent than the invisible mist of the sea and more like flame. As these men walked off by the margin of the pool in the sunset, the dust of their bare feet rose high as their knees like flame; and half blinded by the splendor of light and no longer seeing how their feet trod the sand, you would have thought their shoulders invisibly winged. When the sun had set, they had disappeared; before me the last of the camels went by, its flat feet raising no dust, clear in all its long and undulating movement, and even the chill rifle barrel clear by the saddle.

I returned to my house. The terrace was flooded with moonlight, save for the deep shadow of the wall. Out of this Mohammed stood up silently, startling me. His face was indistinct, but against the clarity of the moonlight his head and his shoulders in their white robe were clearly defined. Taking my hand, he led me into the unlighted room, and there pressed upon me a little packet.

"Do you like them?" he asked, eagerly.

I could feel with my fingers that they were small circular mats of open straw work common in the town. It was the one gift I accepted without uneasiness and dread; but Mohammed could not understand this, nor was he satisfied with my saying that I should be pleased

AN ARAB SHRINE

with anything he gave me for the reason that he had given it. He insisted upon knowing if I liked the mats, and I said: "Yes, I do."

I desired him to give me an address to which I could send him a line some day; but the words for letter and sending and post and all that would not come. In the end he read my mind.

"A letter," he questioned, "and where to send it me?"

Easy enough when he said it. Yes; what should I write on the letter so that it would be brought to him? After a moment's silence, he said:

"Write Mohammed ould Lehsen, and then—and then —why, then Sahara."

Boujma and Abdullah, who had remained seated in the shadow, now called out that time was passing. As no ray of moonlight penetrated the narrow stairway, we had the lighted lantern to go down by.

The three men stepped over the high threshold into the street; but Mohammed turned back and, with an inarticulate cry, flung his arm round my neck. It did not need this sharp burst of feeling from him, however, to prove to me that between human beings whom historic prejudice might make almost incomprehensible to one another, there can exist a tie which is not sundered without pain.

The three Arabs hastened away. In the moonlight the dust of their feet was like a white fog, which veiled them from sight, I think, even before they took the turning.

When, two months later, I was again in Timbuctoo, I learned that Mohammed had returned safely from the pursuit and had gone back to his home in the desert. Monsieur Abd El-Kadir, though Mohammed had been unknown to him, had been kind enough to get hold of him and deliver into his hands a small parcel of tea and sugar I had left for him. The so courteous merchant was curious to discover how I had come to know Mohammed.

"He is not an Arab, truly," he said, "but largely of Berber stock." He added, with a searching look: "You know, perhaps, that he has had little to do with Christians." [An adjective he applied not contemptuously, but apologetically.] "I am surprised that he went into your house." He repeated that Mohammed was not Arab, but Berber, which, by the way, explains the light I had noticed in his eyes on the occasion of our first meeting.

A few days afterwards Monsieur Abd El-Kadir had us to dinner; and seeing that he was in an amiable and expansive mood, we got him to talk to us about the country and tell us stories about the men in it, the blacks and the Arabs. We asked him about the Touaregs, of whom we were desirous of seeing more than we had seen, and whether they were so untrustworthy as they were said to be. We brought up the tale we had often heard of the Touareg chief who, in the Government buildings in Timbuctoo, had treacherously turned upon a French officer and killed him. For a moment

Monsieur Abd El-Kadir was silent, looking from one to the other of us; but then he said:

"I knew that man well. He was a man of proud bearing and tremendous physical strength, noble, and honest of heart. He was thoroughly a man of the desert, the head of his family, highly respected among his own people. Of the life of the city he knew almost nothing, and nothing of the Europeans. He spoke no language but his own, and on the rare occasions when he came into Timbuctoo was dependent on an interpreter.

"At the time of his last visit he fell into the hands of an interpreter who was unscrupulous, and who tricked him into buying many things he had no intention of buying and did not know he had bought, till a bill was presented to him, together with a summons to pay. This bill he paid, though having no idea of how he had incurred the indebtedness. Knowing him to be rich, the interpreter tried again to bleed him; other and bigger bills were presented to him. But these he refused to pay. Thereupon the interpreter contrived to get him put into prison pending a trial for nonpayment of debts.

"One of the military commanders of the town at that time happened, unfortunately, to be tactless. Never doubting that the Touareg was guilty, and wishing, perhaps, to prevent the delay and trouble of a trial, he sent for the prisoner, and through an official interpreter gave him a stiff talking to. The Touareg made no reply except to state that he would not pay

money for things he had not bought. Threats brought from him the statement that no one could ever force him to pay money he did not owe.

" 'Very well,' said the commander, 'we shall seize your flocks and your camels and sell them.'

" 'You have no right to do that,' the Touareg declared, 'and if you do that I will kill you.'

"Goaded too far by the man's imperturbability and his defiance, the officer said: 'It is already done.'

"Instantly the Touareg tore loose a bolt of wood and killed him. Hearing the interpreter's cries for help, the black soldiery rushed in and clubbed the Touareg to death."

"It is a terrible story," we said.

"Yes. And that man was the grandfather of your friend, Mohammed ould Lehsen."

Chapter VIII: The Departure

I

STEAMBOAT SERVICE ON the Niger between Koulikoro and Kabara, which alone renders Timbuctoo easily accessible to the European, can be maintained only during the season of high water in that region—roughly, from the end of June to the first of January. Though the flood moves with the majesty of the seasons, there are curious local irregularities in the rise and fall of the waters. Round Bamako and Koulikoro the ebb is sudden and swift; in the latitude of Timbuctoo it is slow. Indeed, often the water is still rising even in the pool at Timbuctoo long after it has drained so low round Koulikoro as to make navigation precarious. In spite of delays caused by running aground and lying by at night, the Navigation Company will keep its boats running as late as it dares, and there is likely to be more than one last boat. You can never be certain. If you miss the last boat, your only way to get out of Timbuctoo, unless you wish to risk two months of desert, is to hire a barge with

crews of native boatmen and take a month's poling on the river under suns which grow hotter and hotter.

When Mohammed left, about the end of December, there was already doubt of how many more steamers there would be that season from Kabara to Koulikoro. One lived from day to day, planning to depart, but always uncertain when; and the time passed slowly. The only event of any general interest was a celebration in honor of a visiting French official. The squares by the Government buildings were made gay with pennants. Touareg chiefs rode in from the desert on their camels and their horses. Over the edge of their veils, their great dark eyes with those curious glints of topaz fixed you with a stare as immovable as a lion's. Lance in hand, they awaited the arrival of the Great Commander, whose boat would come up the canal to the very edge of the crimson carpet laid along the sands; and who, in his own brilliant uniform, would stride up from the shore between the rows of *meharists* on their white camels and of black, red-sashed soldiery standing at fixed attention.

We were assembled for the show at half past seven in the morning. It was still cold. The Touaregs and the mounted troops were muffled in loose robes. Your French friends, with whom you had had many a gay talk in the office apart from the store, over a cool *apéritif* and everybody dressed any old way, you hardly recognized in the stiff *tenue* exacted by the occasion. Walking impatiently back and forth, they pulled at their

collars, swearing softly at their discomfort and making quite acrid fun of one another's awkward and strait-laced appearance. We waited and waited. It was already past nine o'clock, the hour set for the javelin-throwing, the athletic games, the races, the strange dances of the Touareg vassals planned as homage and entertainment for the visitor. We Westerners felt the grip of Time. The *meharists'* camels grew restive. The Touareg chiefs dismounted and sat in rings on the sand.

At this corner of the city stands the ancient twelfth-century mosque, and all the inhabitants of Timbuctoo being gathered before the Government Building, two of us thought this a good occasion to penetrate into it. At a little distance, you would say the outer walls are built of adobe, like all the houses of the city; but looking at them closely you see they are built of irregular balls of stone, mortared and plastered over with mud. Nowhere is there grace or firmness of line.

Sand was heaped and drifted all along the walls and in the doorways, which were shut with ill-matched planks askew on hinges. Pushing aside one of these ignoble barricades, we found ourselves at once in deep gloom. To our left stretched an aisle dim as a cavern, which we followed, feeling in the packed sand with our feet, not touching the wall with our fingers for fear of scorpions. Now and again we lit a match, in the flare of which we caught a glimpse of Arabic texts carved in the muddy plaster. Everything was dry and dusty

there in the gloom where you would have thought to find damp mold. Meanwhile we perceived that we were following the innermost of several parallel arcades, and turning, we made our way across these towards a distant gray light, which proved to be the light of day in a courtyard. Here there was utter abandon and neglect. The sand underfoot was in mounds, and sand was drifted almost as high as the walls in the corners. In centuries gone by there had been water here and a garden; but now there was no growing thing, not a thorn shrub, not a weed, nothing but sand and dust.

We wandered again through the arcades, which travelers say are not unlike the interior of the Egyptian pyramids, and entered by chance another and a smaller courtyard, whence uneven steps laid in the masonry led up to the tower, the ugly pyramid with its protruding joists. A little way up, the stairway was blocked by one of those rude plank doors, heavily padlocked, and we could not get so high even as to the platform whence the muezzins call to prayer.

As we were about to leave the court, one of the Faithful, a caretaker with three huge keys hanging at his girdle, came unexpectedly into the inclosure. No surprise altered his passive black face. He merely looked at us seriously. Nor was there any resentment in his eyes. Still, we asked him to pardon our intrusion, a courtesy which doubtless surprised him more than the intrusion itself; and withdrew from the mosque, which, seeming abandoned in all its vastness by the very cen-

turies, without light and color, without marbles or mosaics, brass or crystals, nakedly without hangings and ornament, and even without beauty of line, still was not without austerity and peace.

Just as we returned to the square the official arrived, some three hours behind schedule, and walked briskly up from the canal and into the Government Building. He was now, forcibly, in a great hurry; and so the games and the dancing were called off. While the Touareg chiefs went solemnly into the building, we returned to our humble abodes, pursued all the way by naked children, who, cheated of their show, came shrilly questing their *cinquante centimes*. Timbai the Giant, risen from his sick bed, was in the streets; and with his bland and lofty smile demanded the five francs which he had not been present on Christmas Eve to accept.

II

Baba the Thief was in the army; Alfa had been put out; Mahmadou Siy had been paid a fortnight in advance for his vegetables; Saban was taking up his fishing; Garva was newly married; Alimamy was gone to Gundam; Barka had borrowed a franc which he was in no haste to return; few black people came now to the house. The novelty had worn off for them. But there was Omar's friend, Brahima the Bozo, who would come up to say "Good morning" or "Good evening" in his

own language, and who would jump a somersault for you any time and then double up his great length in laughter.

Often, just after supper, Youba would come with his tall running mate; and while this tall Mahmadou, who had been to school, bent over the typewriter, the little Youba would sit in a chair, always unraveling strands from some discarded strip of cotton, several of which he would hitch to his toe and then twirl them between his palms into new thread. This, thrown on the table, squirmed and twisted like something alive.

If Youba discovered himself watched, he would throw his head back most unexpectedly and laugh; then, immediately, his hands idle in his lap for a moment, would fall into a reverie; after which he quietly took up his work again. He was as swift of hand as he was of glance, instantaneously responsive to a smile. In due time, gathering up his threads and putting them in a pocket of his robe, he would fetch the guitar to me, and then we had to sing over and over again, "All God's Chillun Got Wings," to a rapturous clapping of hands and swaying of heads. This done, he would fling his arms round you with the tight embrace of a child in a passion of delight and gratitude.

If you ever met Youba in the streets by day, which was rare enough since he sat all day sewing with his father, he would never approach you; and if you went up to him, he seemed likely to burn up with some strange excitement which both fascinated and frightened him.

Excitable as the black people are, one does not attribute to them that intensity of feeling in which self-consciousness and reserve are implied. Youba was exceptional, perhaps owing to the mixture of his blood. He was half Arab and half Songhai. While he spoke no word of Arabic and his life was wholly among the blacks, he was still a blend of the two so different races; a temperament in which, notably, the best of both seemed blended. It is firmly believed that the half-breed white inherits only the vices of the two races of which he is a mixture. A study of half-breeds without white strain might show that our civilization, with its systems and its prejudices, and not the laws of heredity, is to blame for the degradation of our half-breeds.

Once or twice, on a sunny Sunday noontime, two *tirailleurs* came and sat on the threshold of the room. Their faces were black as coal; their uniforms fairly breathed cleanliness; their sashes were red as only red flannel can be. With some tact they could be persuaded to leave their sandals outside and step barefoot into the room; where, sitting on the mats, golden in the sun which came through the doorway at noon, they would take tiny musical instruments from their pockets and sing and play monotonously. These men were of Omar's race. When Omar came up to lay the table for dinner, he would stand motionless, his timid eyes wandering to the ceiling, often suffused, while the slender music went on and on without a break. For it was,

he said, a ballad of the ancient kings of the Toucouleurs they were singing.

After the music, we would set a big bowl of rice before the two soldiers, and they would eat it all with delicate fingers. After that they would ask for almost everything in the room and bear no grudge whatsoever that they got each only a quinine pill and a safety pin.

There were likewise two youngsters who would sometimes drop in about noon. They were of a grotesque disparity. Neither could have been more than fourteen years old, yet one was hardly four feet tall, and the other was well over six. The taller one had been born in slavery in the desert. He was shy and gentle like some eland calf. Whatever brought him and his companion to the house it would be hard to say—some native friendliness, some sweet-tempered curiosity. They would stay but a few minutes, and when they left you longed to give them a little money, just to see their faces brighten and to hear their soft voices say, *"Merci, monsieur."* But to have done so would soon have brought a hundred others, towards whom you would have felt no such inclination.

Early in January came windy days, when the town was hidden in dust as in snow and the flowing garments of the natives whipped and rattled like loose sails in a gale. Towards night the wind always dropped and the setting sun played its miracles through a pellucid air, over a desert that lay clear of any cloud. There was

no moon; at night the stars stood forth in hordes against the incalculable profundity of the heavens.

Boujma and Abdullah came almost every afternoon. After tea Boujma would noisily eat up all the tea leaves and wipe the little Moslem teapot and the glasses on his turban, while Abdullah sat at the typewriter and, amid what seemed dark preoccupations, gave a distressed thought now and then to the letters of the alphabet. He drew back shivering from any suggestion of putting three or four of them together in a word, much as a cat draws back from water.

At sunset Abdullah went out on the terrace to pray; and during this time Boujma would stand up and shake out his long robes, unwind his turban and wind it on again, walk up and down the room a bit, then sit down where he had been sitting before, cross-legged by the wall, like some dark bird which had stretched and flapped its wings, ruffled its feathers, and then composed itself all folded up and smooth again. He never failed in the course of this exercise to pick up and consider some object in the room, careful to set it down precisely in the spot whence he had lifted it. When the uneasy and suspicious Abdullah returned, the lantern would be lit, the room in repose, with the keys of the typewriter glistening, and Boujma as motionless as a bird on the nest hatching its own eggs and no others.

To Boujma it must have meant so much less than one dreamed whether or not Abdullah learned now what he had for fifteen days failed to learn—that *je veux* means

I wish and *je vais* means I go. I doubt if Boujma even knew that Abdullah failed to the last to learn this. Every day Abdullah recognized his defeat; there was something finely tragic in the way he buried his face in his hands a moment. Weariness is perhaps more tragic than death. The grim fact thus acknowledged, his mood would change and he would prepare himself for the rite which brought our days to a close before supper time.

On the terrace just outside the door stood the brazier, the kettle steaming in the starlight over the dim coals. To it Abdullah now repaired, and to him were brought the basin, the sponge, the soap, the towel. He would not have the lantern, but, having removed the kettle from the brazier, he would blow the coals ruddy and examine his hands by the light of them. Boujma then poured water from the steaming kettle into the basin. Into this Abdullah put a finger invariably, and invariably jerked it out and shook it cool. Whereupon Boujma brought a goblet of cold water from the jars and poured this into the basin; and now Abdullah cautiously put a whole hand in, only invariably to withdraw it and shake his head. So Boujma would add hot water from the kettle and Abdullah would try it with a finger; and then Boujma would bring more cold, and Abdullah would try it with a hand. A satisfactory temperature was a most delicate thing to arrive at.

In the end, Abdullah's removing his turban was sign that hot and cold were fairly blended. Only Boujma was allowed to assist at the subsequent ablutions; but

ABDULLAH

the scene was fascinating to watch from the room while you held yourself in readiness for the end. Abdullah always got soap in his eyes. It was the European's soap; it was the European alone who could declare that the soap was not poison and who alone must coax the young Berabish to lift his tight eyelids. It was only the European who could persuade him that he could still see.

When the refreshed Abdullah re-entered the room, Boujma on his own insistence, emptied the basin, wiped it on his robe, and set it back in its place. He rinsed the sponge; he restored the soap to the dish; he shook out the towel, banked the fire, drained the kettle; which deeds were not so much a way of service as a means of appraising each article he handled. Meanwhile Omar would come up to lay the supper table and Boujma would descend to the kitchen with him, acquiring thus, and in many other ways, a thorough knowledge of the house and of every single thing in it. Boujma was gifted with foresight.

Bouka often came in the afternoon. We could not get rid of him. His marriage was approaching, and the scarf of the best quality? In the evening, always appearing from nowhere with the ease of a spirit who floats through the door or window and is everywhere at home, sometimes came a young Arab blacksmith, Sherko by name. He never talked but in an intense whisper. He had a French-Arabic word book, much thumbed; and opening this on the table, he would finger each word

and whisper it, quite electric with excitement. Then, you would almost swear, tall and sinewy as he was, he floated away out of the window.

So the days went on till one Monday there came a rumor—it was hardly more, for the telegraph wires had been cut in the wilderness—that the *Mage* would arrive at Kabara the following Thursday and would start back to Koulikoro that same day on her last trip of the season.

The big mud house had become a home; it was already stocked with memories. And now, all of a sudden, the one thing that seemed stranger than having come to Timbuctoo was leaving it.

III

Henceforth, Boujma came at least twice every day to the house, in the early morning and in the early afternoon, and was slow to leave it. Tactfully he asked what disposition was to be made of this and that thing in it. He was not grasping. He had observed thoughtfully, and had come to an accurate conclusion as to what things I should take with me and what things abandon, and among the latter asked for such articles as he could make use of, reminding me that he had been robbed in the desert and was nearly destitute here. If I told him that something he wished to have I had already decided to give to some one else, he instantly relinquished all idea of having it. But in the main, having studied

the field so thoroughly beforehand, he asked for what he wanted before it occurred to others to do so.

He was never importunate and never let appear the faintest inclination to remove anything from the house before I should myself be gone from it. Yet his very tact defeated itself by prolonging the daily circumlocutions through which he approached a request. These were delightful and gave me excellent training in Arabic; but of Arabic I could never grasp more than the gist of a sentence or a story; and after I had once or twice made a great effort to follow one of these perorations, I could not but suspect they all brought up to the same end. An amiable Monday afternoon chat led up to my promising him three of the five tea glasses; Tuesday morning he again recounted his adventure in the desert in such a way as to win my promise of six of the floor mats; and Tuesday afternoon he discoursed with the little Moslem teapot in mind. None the less, I must insist that it was all beautifully done. After all, *il y a toujours la manière;* and Boujma's fine manner merited an ear less stupid than mine.

Of a sudden, on the other hand, this dismembering of the household before the host was fled became both amusing and exciting. The difficult Abdullah, in dark corners, began whispering his desire for certain of my belongings; but—never must I let Boujma know of it! Well, Boujma never heard a word of it from me; yet no sooner had Abdullah hinted the slightest interest in such matters of legacy than Boujma took to coming

at eight in the morning instead of nine, sitting more firmly on the nest, his turban lower over his brows; and there Abdullah, who was a late riser, would find him when he fluttered in at ten, and there leave him when he fluttered promptly out again. In vain Abdullah tried to arrive earlier for tea; Boujma was there before him; till at last Abdullah took to coming late at night, at which time Boujma, like all good Arabs, should be asleep. They never knew how narrowly they missed each other in the stairway, those silent, dark-eyed men.

Tuesday afternoon, Boujma, then Abdullah, then Bouka came to tea, and this was the last time we took it together with full equipment in that room. After Boujma had eaten the tea leaves and wiped out the little teapot, which he and I alone knew he would carry away with him beneath his robe that evening, Abdullah established himself before the typewriter, and Bouka, sitting by the wall, watched him. Just about sunset time some one on the terrace clapped his hands lightly, and a moment later there appeared in the doorway, outlined against the honey-colored light, a young man in a short white tunic, bareheaded. The mass of dark curls about his head, the light grace of his pose, the grace indeed of all his form, which something bulging round his middle under his tunic could not destroy, the low voice wishing us peace, and the radiance which played about it all, gave me the impression of a half-angelic messenger.

It was Boya, come in from the desert for the mail, bearing a greeting from his brother Ibrahim. He was

followed by a young lad, who had wound his turban like a smooth cap over his head, down across his ears and round his throat close up to his chin, so that, in his long blue robe, he looked as if he might have come from a meeting with the Crusaders and was a young Saracen knight.

Boya stood his rifle in the corner and removed the heavy cartridge belt which was under his tunic, and with his friend sat on the mats by the door. They were thirsty and grateful for freshly brewed tea. You would have thought they might have news interesting to the other Arabs; but it was Abdullah who began to talk, his elbows on the table, his slender hands under his chin, looking down on all the others. He talked rapidly and without a break, and the others listened intently. Even when Boya and his friend raised their glasses to their lips, they did not take their eyes from Abdullah's face.

It grew darker and darker in the room. Judging by the silence and the immobility of the listeners, you would have said Abdullah's tale was of wonderful things that cast a spell. Once he paused, and Boya put a question in a low voice; then Abdullah went on again. Everything was shadowy except the steely glitter of the typewriter keys and the faces of Boya and his friend, who were so seated that the last of the light fell upon them from the north windows. Even their romantic beauty faded at last, and we were all vague, dusky shapes, held enchanted by the voice of an invisible speaker.

And what was it all about? Why, Abdullah had a

donkey, and the donkey had wandered away, and Abdullah had gone through all the streets of the city for him, asking at many houses, and had twice made a circle outside the city, and had found tracks like the tracks of his donkey, and had found a man who had seen his donkey, and—ultimately had found his donkey. Now, what was in the donkey's head, that he should wander so? *Allahu akbar!*

IV

Boujma came earlier than usual the next morning, lest Boya, who planned to return to the house, secure things for himself and his brother. If Boya had any such purpose in mind, he hid it completely and was concerned, after tea, during which Boujma looked steadily at him without saying a word, with repeating the delightful experience of a bath. To this the basin was necessary, so Boujma stayed on his nest till the lad returned with it, and then carefully examined it before stowing it away. But then, you see, the basin was already promised to Boujma.

That afternoon I dismantled the room, rolling up the hangings to pack in sacks at dawn on the morrow, dispatching books to various white men in the town, gathering little things together, tearing up papers and old letters. The room of so many visits kept its hospitable air until I took up the mats from the dirt floor, when the whole place seemed of a sudden to go bare and

empty. Of the ten straw mats, I hid a roll of four under the bed, and another similar roll I hid in the stairway from the terrace to the rooftop; and this, O Boujma and Abdullah, that you might better simulate, each before the other, a pure ignorance of what had become of them. When it was dark, Abdullah came and found the room thus undone, even the typewriter locked away in its box, and the two remaining straw mats on the terrace outside.

He had brought with him a young kinsman. This lad did not look like Abdullah, who was refined and elegant, but was a swarthy and unkempt fellow, though not bad-looking. He was ill at ease, if not frightened, in the presence of a Christian host. Of course I knew they wanted tea, but the teapot was already gone, with three of the glasses, gone out long since under Boujma's full robes. Abdullah brewed tea in the coffeepot on the terrace and asked never a question; and we three drank out of the one glass. Little by little the stranger's shyness wore off and he told of his eight-day journey in from Arrouan. Between here and Arrouan, he said, you could find water every day, if you knew how to look for it. He whispered rather than spoke, perhaps because for eight days and nights he had been on the watch for robbers. Thus we had our last tea out on the terrace, the coffeepot and one glass between us, Abdullah, myself, and this ungroomed young stranger who hardly spoke above a whisper.

At nine in the night Boujma stole in, his face quite

muffled in his turban, only his eyes showing in the light of the lantern. I brought out the mats from under the bed. He unrolled them rapidly, examined them, expressed himself satisfied, shouldered them, and swiftly and stealthily took them from the house. He said he would not return before morning, which relieved me of the anxiety lest he and Abdullah should meet under my roof.

Omar had left for the night; the big house seemed intolerably empty. Then Abdullah returned, his face, likewise, muffled in his turban, and I took the mats for him from their hiding place in the stairway. But Abdullah had brought a little boy with him, who waited in the courtyard below, and Abdullah loaded him with the mats and sent him off to that house of his, wherever it was, where Mohammed had left his salt.

It was nearly midnight; nevertheless, Abdullah ventured into the empty room and, sitting down in a chair, thought a long while.

"I have a sister," he said at last. "She is a beautiful girl. She reads and writes Arabic, Tamashek, and French. She married a Christian and went away with him to Bamako. You are going to Bamako, aren't you? You will find my sister. Her name is Fathma men Tallem. Anyone will tell you where she lives, for she is distinguished. Do not forget her name. Tell her that I always miss her. Tell her that on the day she went away I ran in to Kabara. The boat was already moving off. I saw her among the crowd on the deck and waved

to her, but she did not see me. Tell her that I have written her and that she has not written me. I have heard that her husband is dead. Tell her to write and let us know if this is so."

Here he broke off, and asking for paper and pen, drew up to the head of an old box and by the light of the lantern rapidly wrote a letter to her in Arabic. When he had finished it, he read it aloud at top speed, then sealed it in an envelope.

"This," he said, "you will take with you to Bamako. You will find my sister and give it to her"; and he wrote his sister's name in Arabic characters on the envelope and bade me write it in French.

He lingered a little while after this, as if there were many things he wished to talk about; but, after all, his teacher did not know enough Arabic to understand them, and besides, it was late. He said he would return very early in the morning, just as Boujma had said he would do, too; but since there was nothing left in the house for either Abdullah or Boujma but what they could slyly hide under their robes without letting each other know, I no longer worried about keeping them apart.

V

The next morning they arrived within a few minutes of each other about half past six, and while Omar ruthlessly packed the sacks they circulated through the

house, as independent in their movements as two fish in a bowl. Meanwhile, there arrived as from nowhere many black boys who had nothing whatsoever to say, but who plucked at spots in the walls and scuffed their bare feet in the dust of the floor, and who now and then appeared to pick something. They got in Omar's way, and so we shooed them out. But there were always one or two of them hanging about like flies; and when we went down with the luggage and took it out to the donkey man in the street, they swarmed again into the stripped house.

The stripped house, indeed? To be sure, there seemed now to be nothing left in it except the folded iron table and the two folded iron chairs which belonged to Abd El-Kadir; but the stripping had hardly more than begun. There were the rickety shelves askew on the walls; there were nails in the walls that had served as hooks; there were splinters of wood in the dust of the floor, a burnt match or two, a thread, a broken button, a bit of string, a bit of paper. There was the split nib of a pen, there was a bent safety pin; there were stamps on the torn letters thrown into a corner for burning, half of a quinine capsule, an empty tin of shoe dressing, a raveled end of the gauze with which I had bandaged Mohammed's knee. On the terrace there was a cigarette end or two, and there was the bit of cloth that had served as a strainer and a cover for one of the water jars; on the stairs a half-burnt bit of charcoal; in the kitchen were fragments of charcoal and charcoal dust, there was

a bottle, there was a soiled lithograph, once Omar's favorite. Up and down the stairs and round and round the rooms they drifted, these black boys, nor did they depart from the house till there was not one thing on the walls or in them, one thing on the floor or in the dust of it, one thing on terrace or in kitchen or in courtyard or on the roof or in any corner no matter how dark —not one single removable mite left.

Well, the donkeys were on the way to Kabara with the luggage and Omar was with them. Boujma and Abdullah were gone. I put out the last black boy and bolted the door behind him; and if ever a man was alone, I was alone in that house, which had been stripped of the very memories clinging to the mud walls. I went over the clothes I wore to make sure they were still left on me.

Especially was the room upstairs now unbearable in its emptiness, the sense of desolation enhanced by the iron table and the iron chairs folded into uselessness and standing inhospitably against the wall. For want of something to do, I carried these down and put them into one of the high, dark rooms we had never used. In fact, I unfolded one of the chairs and sat down to rest a minute there.

The door being open on the sunny and abandoned courtyard, the end of the room where I sat was in bright light, but the farther end was all shadowy. As I was looking absently at the floor, which was as good a place to look at as any, I saw, just on the edge of the shadow,

the print of a naked foot, sharply defined. The mud floor must have been wet to receive such an impression, now hardened firmly in it. It must have been here that Boya had come to bathe. Was it yesterday morning, or was it in some already incalculably remote past? I looked at it as intently as Robinson Crusoe looked at the footprint on the strand, but with a different agitation; for he saw in what met his eye the portent of things to come, but I saw in the perfect print of Boya's foot the only trace left in all the house of things irrevocably gone.

So I got up and quit the house and padlocked the big outer door behind me. Turning in the street, I saw Saban standing by the wall. He was immovable as a statue, some statue, perhaps, yet to be carved which shall express the dignity and the nobility of the human race in the person of a black man, even as they appeared then to me in the person of the ragged Saban. He did not unbend, nor even take the hand I offered.

"I came to bid you good-by," was all he said, but with such earnestness that it was a benediction.

Going on to the missionaries' house, I learned that the *Mage* would not reach Kabara before night. They kindly invited me to lunch with them. After lunch the water carrier came on his rounds, the same water carrier who had served me. We had said our farewells, he and I, in the wordless language which is as comprehensible as any other. As he lingered a moment,

however, toil-worn and patient and friendly, I could not help saying to him through one of the missionaries:

"You are a good man."

"You," he replied through the missionary, "are a good man, too."

"But," I said, "you are a good man because God made you so; I am a good man because I have given you gifts."

He smiled and answered:

"Yes, that is so."

Chapter IX: Return

I

I HAD COME TO TIMBUCTOO with the hope of going north thence across the Sahara with a caravan of Arabs. During my stay there no caravan had set out; and the government officials had practically refused to allow me to accept the invitations of a few Arabs to go into the desert with them as far as the oases where they lived. And this because the raiders were unusually active all through the season. So I had gradually given up hope of making my way out of Timbuctoo as I had planned to do. Now, the *Mage* was hung up somewhere in the Niger; the telegraph wires had been cut, so that we could get no news of her; and I had three days to wait in Timbuctoo, with no house of my own and with my boy and all my belongings in Kabara. During these three days a caravan arrived from Morocco, which would stay in Timbuctoo long enough for the merchants to sell their dates, and then return to Morocco across the desert. Though it would have been possible for me to make this journey with the Arabs, a combination of adverse de-

tails, which I could have believed almost fatal, in which, indeed, the missionaries along the river professed to see the determination of some superhuman agency, denied it me; and with just time to catch the last boat of the season, too late even to secure a mount, unreconciled and unwilling, I turned south and walked away from Timbuctoo.

Omar was in Kabara, and we went aboard the *Mage.* This steamer has an upper deck and six cabins, and for that reason travelers along the river prefer her to the *Bonnier.* But she was filled to overflowing. The season of furloughs had begun, and traders and officers had come up from posts far down the river and taken passage on the *Mage,* headed for home. Not only were the quarters for white travelers jammed so that many had to sleep on *couchettes* in the little dining saloon, but the black people on the lower deck had not space literally for all of them to lie down at night, and, like Omar, went without sleep for sheer discomfort. I was allowed to set up my cot and my net on the forward deck after nightfall; and so, though I had not a corner of my own to repair to during the day, I did have the night and the ever more luminous stars pretty much to myself. Round me on the deck slept the silent black steersmen; they awoke me softly in the morning.

It was hotter than Tophet by day. At dinner, in the crowded, stifling saloon, our soup drowned thousands of winged insects. Many more flew down our sweaty necks. Some one was always jumping up with

a shudder and clawing himself. Fortunately, none of these pests happened to sting.

We were prepared for a slow trip; the river was already so low that we could travel only by day, picking a course among the sand bars. But above Mopti we had hardly enough water to get on by at all, and every day, and sometimes twice a day, ran solidly aground. Then we would blow the whistle and natives would come down the flat reaches of the river in their canoes to talk with the pilots. We would put out two or three cables, and fifty black men, many of them impressed from the passengers, though more were volunteers, would take hold and try to pull us over the bar. But invariably the boat refused to budge. Then they took the cargo out of her. I don't know how many times we unloaded and loaded. I know we had already lost four full days when, on what should have been the last afternoon, with Kouli-koro almost in sight, we ran on a rock and stove a hole in the bottom of the *Mage*. Out came the whole cargo again, sack by sack, bale by bale; and people, weary and nerve-racked after two and a half years in African wastes, gave up hope of catching the weekly train from Bamako; which meant not only a week's idling in Bamako, but possibly missing their steamer in Dakar. After the tranquillity of the ancient city I had left, nothing in this returning step to civilization struck me so tormenting as the grip of Time—nothing so damnable.

And nothing, I think, is so unnatural. Live but a

THE "MAGE"

HAULING OFF THE "MAGE"

little while among the black people, or with the Arabs who come in from the desert, and you will feel the perverted tyranny of watches and bells. You will feel the stupidity of Time. If you ask a simple black man of Timbuctoo how far it is to Bamako, he will say, perhaps, thirty nights. And so it is, in the natural human way he travels it. And if you live as he lives, you will know it is thirty nights; you may count on that. But being even suckled on schedule, you want the white man's Time. Four days and nights by river steamer, you hear. And you jam in with the crowd. The clumsy craft runs aground, something goes wrong with the engines, you hang round for delayed cargo; and little by little you fall behind schedule. Time exerts itself; every minute is a rasping on your nerves. Ultimately, it is *not* four days, or five, or six, seven, eight, nine. We were twelve days on the way from Timbuctoo to Bamako; and every white person on board, except me who had none in mind, missed a connection in Bamako.

One white woman made a momentary and spectacular, but heroic, stand against this Time. She was a young woman more elegant than respectable, who had, presumably, made a home for a dozen different white men in Africa, and was still doing so for one aboard the crowded *Mage*. We had got away from Mopti, prodded through the sand bars at the mouth of the Bani River, and were progressing fairly smoothly upstream. Then there arose a clamor among the black passengers, and

the prolonged wailing of one black woman. She was dressed up with a gaudy kerchief knotted over her head and beads and bits of ribbon in the plaits of her hair which stuck out below it. But her black face, naturally passive and statuesque, was distorted with grimaces and wet with the flow of her tears. I can see her now, standing on the bow of the barge we had in tow alongside, howling into the vast African sky, and all us white people gathered at the rail of the upper deck, looking down on her and wondering what it was about.

Most of us were ill at ease. It was chiefly a bother, that crying; yet we all felt something was wrong. The black crew men were impassive, but the news came by degrees from some of them who could speak a little French. This black woman's son should have joined her at Mopti, but had arrived just too late to board the boat. He had got himself ferried across the river, and now we could see him running along the shore, running, running, falling down and picking himself up again, keeping up with the boat, too.

It was harrowing to watch. Often he disappeared from sight behind a sandy dune, and then the mother's wails were full of despair. The white purser came along and stood looking to the shore. We were already very late, but had got going well on the smooth stretch of the river.

"We can't stop the boat," he said. "Tell her not to cry so. How old is her son? Fourteen? Well, he can run fast. We'll have to tie up for the night, and he

can join us then. Or he can find some one to take him on at night in a canoe and join us before morning."

When these words had been shouted down to her in her own tongue, the mother shrieked in anguish. The expressionless crew men stood by and translated her broken phrases.

. . . Her son, he was little; only fourteen. How could he run like that all the hot afternoon? Look! he has fallen down. O God! O God! And if he fell down and hurt himself and could not run? There were the lions at night. . . . And wicked men who would kill him. . . .

Our course was taking us yet farther from the shore. So up spoke this white woman who was by no means of the pure and chaste, and she said in a loud, clear voice:

"Stop the boat!"

Nobody swore at the prospect of delay. The purser, who was a kind fellow, ordered the boat stopped immediately.

Then the white woman made a scene. The boat was stopped, the black crew had already cast off one of the barges and were poling it in to the shore for the black boy; but still the white woman went on with her scene, which was grand.

Black or white, a woman was a woman, and a mother a mother. She had no children of her own; but she knew, as every woman knew, what it is to be a mother. Her furious eyes swept us as we stood in a circle; she

struck her chest the most resounding thwacks, she fell into poses which would have made the Goddess of Liberty look like a marionette.

"Je suis femme," she cried. *"Je sais ce que c'est d'être mère!"*

Meanwhile, they brought the black boy back to the boat. His mother shut up, folding him in her arms. And still the white woman went on, till at last, when we were under way again, one of the men chuckled.

"The boy is with his mother," he said. *"Assez, madame."*

So she turned and made her way to the lower deck. I saw her an hour or so later, and asked her if the black woman was happy. She shrugged her shoulders. Was the black woman grateful?

"What difference?" she replied, with another shrug.

But she had stopped the boat, and we all admired her for it. Little by little the confusion died down. We found our corners, hot and cross, and glared malevolently at one another.

II

We tied up to the shore every night, and would start off again before sunrise in the morning. At half-past six they served black coffee in the little dining saloon; no milk with it and nothing to eat. *Déjeuner* was at noon, and my mornings were intolerably hungry. Many of the white passengers got milk somehow. There were

flocks of goats and sheep all along the river. So I called up Omar, who had been my attendant now for nearly three months, and asked him to find me milk for the mornings and heat it, so that I could have the good *café au lait* which he had always made for me. But Omar reported every morning that he had been unable to find milk.

We reached Mopti in the late afternoon and had to spend the night there. Mopti is a fairly big village, with several white people and with stores. I knew Omar could find milk here in the early morning, and dreamed happily all the night of the fine, fat morrow. At daylight Omar came to my cot and I gave him a bottle to fetch the milk in.

Half an hour later I saw him talking in a group of black men ashore. Aching with hunger, I strode down the gangplank.

"I sent you to get milk," I growled, "and here you are gossiping."

"The flocks are far off, monsieur. There'll be no milk till the stores open in a little while."

I waited and waited, half an hour, an hour, an hour and a half. Then Omar returned to the boat. He had no milk.

"You're a worthless idiot!" I roared at him.

He gave me a dreadful look.

"I have nothing to learn from you," he replied.

"I did not teach you to lie and steal," said I.

He started almost as if I had struck him.

"Where's my wash basin?"

"Monsieur, you know I forgot it."

(As a matter of fact, my bags had been unpacked and packed I don't remember how many times in the confused days while we were waiting for the *Mage* and it seemed likely I should leave Timbuctoo by the desert. The wash basin had been left at Kabara.)

"Come and set up my bed every night and come and take it down in the morning. Keep out of my sight the rest of the time."

So that was that. One day I rooted out some soiled clothing from my bags and stuffed them in behind my folded cot, meaning to wash them myself. Later I found they were not there; that night they were returned, washed and folded. I have often wondered why Omar did that.

I remembered that in the confused time when I was about to cross the desert, Omar had walked back to Timbuctoo from Kabara and had said to me:

"Why do you not take me with you?"

There were many reasons: the certainty that if we had trouble in the desert with unfriendly Arabs, Omar would be made a slave; the cost of returning him to Bamako from Algeria. I wrote in his book the recommendation which his next employer would demand, that he was intelligent, honest, an exceptionally good cook. I would then have paid him off but for a few odd jobs he could do in the morning; and in the morning the whole desert trip fell through. So here was Omar

on the *Mage* with me, his fare paid, and as favorable a recommendation in his book as could well be written there. I should owe him considerably less than a month's wages when we arrived in Bamako. In my present state I was little likely to give him a bonus. I was very likely, on the other hand, to cross out the recommendation I had written for him, and substitute the sort of report that would make it hard for him to get a good job. He could have dropped off the boat at any village, very much to the good in the whole affair. I might have reported him to Monsieur Mademba, the influential black merchant who had got him for me in the first place. That is what he perhaps feared. Yet I thought of such a move so little at the time, that I doubt if it ever occurred to him.

Months later, when by a chance I had not dreamed of I was going down the Niger in a small boat, I touched at Mopti again of an early morning. I went ashore myself to get milk. The herds were far from the village. A black official told me there was little chance of my getting milk in the stores. But he was bossing a gang of prisoners, and he ordered one of them off across the flats to get milk for me, and in an hour the man brought the milk back.

However it may have been, Omar washed my clothes and he kept out of my sight. When now and then I caught a glimpse of him, I thought he looked miserable and drawn. The black passengers were so crowded on

that trip that few of them could be comfortable. I dare say Omar was wretched.

As if it had any importance: the rage of a hungry white man's nerves, with the answering sting of a black boy's insolence. And when we had got, after that long, torrid voyage, to Kabara, and I had gone up to the deserted hotel for a day or two to collect courage to return further into civilization, Omar brought his friends to see me again.

III

During those twelve days on the *Mage* I had not forgotten the letter Abdullah had charged me with, and when I reached Bamako I set out to find his sister and deliver it. I suspected Fathma men Tallem might not be of such eminence as her brother believed, for all she was married to a white man and spoke many languages; and when the black postal clerks proved unable to identify her, I was not surprised. They had never heard or seen her name. After I had talked with them long enough to convince them that I was not bound to make trouble for her, they gave me a clue. Let me go to such and such a store and ask for such and such a man, a young black man from Timbuctoo, who would surely know, if any one knew, who she was and where she might be found.

A short walk took me to the store in question, a long, low adobe building, deep in the shade of acacias, with

native tailors seated all along the veranda behind sewing machines. The white overseer kindly summoned the young man from Timbuctoo. The elegance and the mellifluous courtesy characteristic of the Timbuctoo Songhai were especially evident in this man here among the reserved Bambaras. They stirred in me a quite poignant homesickness for the city already so far away, with whose natives I had had so many an intimate contact; and the fact that I was indeed a messenger from Timbuctoo with news for one who had been familiar there gave me more keenly than I had ever felt before the sense that I had in some measure entered into and become part of the life of Africa. But a moment later I realized that all the outward graces of the young man before me did not conceal his profound distrust. I pronounced many times the name of Abdullah's sister, and every time the man shook his head. He had never heard of Fathma men Tallem. Only when I produced the letter and when he had handled it did he begin to listen. I told the whole story. Then he wrote down a name on a piece of paper. It was Yurca Hari.

In Yurca Hari's house Fathma now lived, for her husband had died and left her penniless, so that for the time being she was dependent on the generosity of her friends. The native villages which surround Bamako are widespread. How ever was I to find the house? The young man could not leave his work for some time yet; but he walked a little way with me till we met a

fellow to whom he confided me, who knew the way, and brought me to Yurca Hari's house.

It did not differ from others. There was the wide court, with the circular huts round it. There were, however, two European steamer chairs in the court. In each of these reclined a young woman, not pure black, brightly but simply dressed; and on a mat another, darker woman was braiding a young girl's hair in the stiff plaits which alone the kinks permit. All three women regarded me with utter indifference, though they soon paid some slack attention to what my guide was telling them. There was then some questioning, and finally the woman who was braiding the child's hair addressed me in smooth French. Often as I had been surprised by it, such strangely sudden evidence of the knowledge of a common tongue never failed to astonish me.

The woman said that only the day before, Fathma men Tallem had left that house and gone to live elsewhere. She did not know how to direct me to her present dwelling; but her son knew it, though he did not know that Fathma had gone to live there; and if I would wait, her son would conduct me there when he returned from his work. Before long the son came, and he was the young clerk with whom I had talked at the store.

As he led me through street after street on the way to Fathma's new place, he told me that her husband had been a bad man, a drunkard and a brute. It seemed

to me that Fathma was well rid of him and that she could now do no better than return to her own family in Arrouan. The young man was of the same opinion, and told me that he and his mother had done their best to persuade Fathma to go back. As it happened, his mother was returning to Timbuctoo in two days and had offered to take Fathma in her canoe; but for some reason Fathma refused to leave Bamako. Vividly I had with me the memory of that last night in my house in Timbuctoo, the dismantled room and Abdullah scratching away his letter to this sister by the light of my lantern; the emotion in his voice and in his eyes when he spoke of her, and the pride with which he praised her beauty and her accomplishments. Her actual plight must be one he would be sorry indeed to hear of. By the deep affection I felt for the Arabs who had come to my house in Timbuctoo, I vowed to bring what wisdom I had to bear upon her and, as befitted the friend of her brother, to help her.

Swiftly and with no halloo we turned into a court-yard. There lay Fathma on a mat. On our entrance she merely sat up, a plump, handsome Arab girl, adorned with various trinkets. My conductor said that here was word from Abdullah, her brother; at which she seemed excited and looked quite beyond me towards the door through which we had appeared. Evidently she did not associate me with her brother, but looked for some one still to come; and when she learned the truth, her face fell and tears came into her eyes. She

was beautiful, indeed, as Abdullah had told me, and she spoke with that hoarse broken voice which is characteristic of so many Arab women, a promise of hot passion. But not a word of French did she know, this sister who was accomplished in so many languages; and when I gave her Abdullah's letter, written in Arabic, she held it helplessly upside down and then passed it to me to read—with a pathetic shrug.

I stayed perhaps ten minutes there, giving her the news I had of men she had known at home, young Mohammed Lehsen, Ibrahim, Boya, and others, whom she was plainly delighted to hear of, over each of whom her eyes brightened a moment with moisture. She then told me of her husband's death, never mentioning that he had beaten her alive, but finding him cruel chiefly in that he had left her no money. She was now in straits, though a girl so good-looking need hardly go hungry in Bamako.

It had been a surprise to find this marriage, of which Abdullah had spoken so proudly, had been only one in the custom of the country; but I still believed he would not be proud of having his sister merely picking up men here and there in the streets of Bamako. I urged her to go back home. This she refused to do, saying that she had left home with a husband and plenty of money, superbly, as it were, and she refused to return without a husband and without money.

I found myself caught in the most ridiculous mess of sentiments and traditions. In my boyhood there was

a popular ballad, "Just Tell Them That You Saw Me," all about a good young man who met in the big city an erring girl from his home town. As I stood in that compound in Bamako before the beautiful sister of Abdullah, the air of that wretched song sneaked into my mind, and couplets I could have recalled only to laugh at:

"Is that you, Madge?" I said to her.
She quickly turned away.
"Don't turn away, Madge,
I am still your friend."

Nothing could have been less appropriate, and nothing, probably, more insulting to Fathma men Tallem. Though her eyes grew moist whenever I mentioned her brother, that was only from a sane homesickness. She shrugged her shoulders at my advice; and being of an ancient and a proud race, soon had enough of it. She cut it quite definitely off by asking me if I did not know a European who wanted a Moorish wife. Of course she would be willing to take one who was going to Timbuctoo. By the way, was I going back to Timbuctoo? . . .

Finally she gathered up the letter from her brother, which all of us had looked at from four angles and none of us had been able to read, and took me out into the street. We hailed many black men and asked them if they could read Arabic, to hit upon one at last who said he could, but must go first to his house and fetch his spectacles. Fathma declared she would wait for

him. She bade me good-by, not without graciousness, and the young man from Timbuctoo led me back to the hotel. On the way I said that if he and his mother could persuade Fathma to return to Timbuctoo, I would contribute twenty-five francs towards her expenses. And I went to the train to see the mother off to Koulikoro, where her canoe awaited her; but no Fathma was with her.

A night or two later I had an *apéritif* with a young sergeant whom I had met on the *Mage*. He was on his way home, in a devil-may-care mood, and he fell to talking about women. He wanted an Arab girl for the few days he should be in Bamako. I kept silent about Fathma, though well aware that by so doing I should not, perhaps, deserve her gratitude. The sergeant mentioned Yurca Hari, and I pricked up my ears. She was the most famous Moorish beauty in the Sudan, a girl over whom countless white men had simply lost their senses. But you could not have her for a thousand francs, or even two thousand, or five. She had a black man whom she truly loved. That did not prevent her from marrying a white on the side from time to time, and fabulous were the dowries the white men had paid for her. And she was wicked, too. Many a white man she had played to the point of paying his dowry on the day before the appointed marriage day, and she had taken it and never appeared for the marriage. This had happened several times, till at last one of her dupes was shrewd enough to have her up before the judge, and

now she was walking carefully. And he told me another story, of the white man who had gone mad for having looked upon the white beauty of her body as she lay asleep in the moonlight beside the sleeping black man whom she truly loved.

IV

With Abdullah's letter delivered to his sister, the last thread which bound me to Timbuctoo was severed; yet the spell of the old city haunted me more closely than ever. Nothing actually before my sight was so vivid as the visions of Timbuctoo glowing night and day within my eyes. It was not at all as if Timbuctoo had been a dream, but as if it had been and was still reality. Bamako was the disordered fantasy. Many times a day aspects of our civilization which here showed themselves struck me with a sort of nightmare dread: the shrieking and banging of trains in the station, automobiles and the stench of burned gasoline, the impatience and the rush of white people, the movie theatre back of the hotel, and the music of a wretched phonograph. I almost fought against these things as a man will fight against the distortions of bad dreams, and my refuge from them was in memories of Timbuctoo, in which I seemed to wake up again and live without fear.

Never in Timbuctoo had I lost my identity as a white man, a "European." That I knew very well. But I think that identity had been somewhat modified;

now it was turning back again to its former self. There was the rising up of self-importance. The assumption of a self-conscious and critical point of view came all of a sudden. It was after dinner one night. I heard the sound of tom-toms from a big native village perhaps a mile away to the east, and now and again, when there was a moment's silence about the hotel, a phrase or two of music. I wandered off across the flat plain in search of the celebration of which these sounds certainly brought me news; and with the aid of a black man or two, met on the way, came to a compound and to a big dance in honor of the circumcision. It was a hazy moonlight. To the music of native xylophones and tom-toms, white robed men and women stamped round in circles, bent partly towards the ground. Now and again a chorus of young girls and women broke unexpectedly into long, long phrases of melody, which cut quite athwart the instrumental music, yet were in some way I could not tell cadenced with it. Heaven knows how they did it, or what was the feeling which seemed to change the assembly into a clear melody, music that did not soar, but floated, infusing the air like the moonlight which was less clear, leaving the dancers inanimate as fallen leaves in a low wind. It was a singular exaltation, without any aspiring.

After a while I went away and, hearing the sound of more vigorous tom-toms, hunted through the deserted streets of that village till I came upon another group. In a cleared space a man was dancing with a doll. It

THE LIGHT-FILLED STREETS OF TIMBUCTOO

was a frenzy of dancing; and, one among the onlookers, I roared with laughter, with admiration, too, elated as they were in a huge farce. Then, as I watched, some critical faculty in me noted the character of the dancer's movements; in a flash, the whole great thing was reduced to a couple of words. I was looking on an "obscene dance," and I could not laugh any more, but only snicker, while the whole-hearted black people, among whom I stood, challenged the sky with their laughter. I do not remember that in Timbuctoo I had ever so reduced myself to meanness, for all I had raged at Alfa over a matter of fifty centimes.

Twice I let the weekly express to the coast go without me. I simply had not the courage to join the crowd and head towards the riot of civilization. So it happened that I met an American who was bound on a scientific expedition down the Niger, way down as far as the frontier of English Nigeria, a long voyage, and a slow one. There were no more steamboats. He must go in a scow, poled or paddled by black boatmen from stage to stage. Two months of it there would be, at least; pretty lonesome for him with no company but the black boatmen. The scow was big enough for two passengers. He saw that I was at loose ends and invited me to join him on his journey.

Meanwhile, the governor of Timbuctoo, who had seen how disappointed I had been by losing the chance to cross the desert, had telegraphed to Bamako requesting officials there to devise a trip for me with a caravan

through Mauretania. So, of a sudden I was confronted with a choice. I had to do what I had hardly been called upon to do in Timbuctoo—make up my mind.

Now, a black man who had an important but a friendly way with him sat down beside me one day in the hotel garden.

"Why are you so distressed?" he asked me.

And I told him I could not decide whether to go to Mauretania or to go down the Niger.

"When one of us is in doubt," he said, "he goes to consult a holy man."

"Do you know a holy man who would advise me?" I asked.

"Yes; a very fine holy man, indeed."

On the next day, he led me to the holy man, who lived in a small hut and seldom went out. I found the hut perfectly clean. A few straw mats lay on the dirt floor; a fine straw curtain hung in the doorway to keep out the glare of the sun. I sat down opposite my adviser. He was not of the Bambaras, I could tell that by his face, but of the more subtle Toucouleurs, though I think he must have had a strain of Arab or Berber in him, since he was not very black and his features were delicate. It was a fine face, with a quick, slight smile, with eyes that were intent but that gave no judgments. I have never seen a man more spotlessly dressed in white; his teeth were flawless; his slender hands and his dark, bare feet seemed almost to have been groomed.

Through my guide I answered the questions he put

me as to my dilemma; and when he had the whole story he fetched a worn little book, in Arabic, and two polished, but uneven, sticks. I was to hold the sticks a moment, then let them fall to the ground. They fell, bounced apart, and came together again, one almost atop the other, parallel. The holy man smiled, and bid me cast the lots again. This time the two sticks fell apart. After he had studied them a moment, the holy man read aloud from the Arabic book, doubtless the Koran. Then he spread a strange parchment on the mat, covered his eyes with one hand, described circles in the air with the other, which he finally let fall upon the parchment. He studied the point of the parchment on which his index finger had fallen; read again from the Koran; spoke to my guide in words which of course I could not understand. I looked at my guide, who seriously and quietly said the one word:

"Mauretania."

Then there was a little talk. The Niger was not mentioned. If I went into Mauretania, things would go well for me and I should make many friends among the Moors and the Arabs. My guide told me it was time for me to go and leave the holy man to his meditations, which, I think, must always have been serene and happy; but the holy man slipped his feet into yellow sandals and accompanied us half way back to the hotel. He had a parasol, and I walked under it with him. I think he was the most courteous and delicate priest I have ever met.

But it was ultimately the chance of revisiting Timbuctoo, which the voyage down the Niger offered, that decided me. The American came to the hotel to lunch; the long, high dining room with the green walls, with shutters against the sun, somber, cool with the air of revolving fans, noisy with the rattle of dishes, though the black boys sped silently on bare feet. There were long tables down the center, and small tables along the sides. We sat at one of the small tables, making plans, and we noticed a long-haired white man who sat at the table next to us. Down at the far end of the room, the door which gave on the station platform was open to the brazen glare of midday. As we sat over our lunch, discussing the need of provisioning ourselves, the chance of hunting, the long-haired man left his place and went out of the dining room, which I vaguely noticed, because one was always conscious of him as of an unpleasant person. A moment later and he was dashing down the length of the room, followed at a few feet by a tall man, who ran so fast that one could not take note of him. Gaining the end of the room, the long-haired man wheeled to the right, dashing for the open doorway; and in the fraction of a second during which he stood framed in the doorway against the blazing light, the tall pursuer shot at him with a revolver. Then both men disappeared. It was like some astounding joke, except it had happened too swiftly. We did not know whether to laugh or to shout.

Women screamed. It had been real enough. There were imperative cries.

"Boy! Boy! Du vinaigre!"

So some had fainted. Men jumped from their seats and ran out through the glaring doorway. Then the black boys came silently on their bare feet with the next course. We asked them what had happened. Why, the tall man had shot at the other. Had he hit him? We must wait till the men came back to tell us.

We learned in due time that the long-haired man had stumbled in the doorway, so that he had fallen to one side. That had saved his life. We might, if we wished to, see the hole made by the bullet in one of the cars standing on the tracks outside. Later we did see this, and must believe the whole thing had happened. As for the long-haired man who had so narrowly escaped vengeance, the black boys grinned; they had no good to say of him. The other, they said, was sick, and they pointed to their heads. We got the story by degrees: the long-haired man had a way with stupid women; the other had a wife who was much younger than he and stupid. He was jealous, this older man, and romantically proud. Moreover, he had been wounded in the war, and trepanned; and here in the heat he had suffered terribly from headaches and had been given to brooding. What a thing to do with a man so wounded in the war—to send him to Africa! Had the Colonial Office no sense, no heart? As for the long-haired man, the story came to us months afterwards that when in

another post to which he had been banished another man shot at him, he had not the luck to stumble out of the way of the bullet.

On the day before I left Bamako to return down the Niger, I went to say good-by to Rassim Mademba, the black merchant. We talked without reserve of ourselves, he of the black people and I of the white. We talked of education and employment, even touched upon religion.

"As you know," he said, "the black people along the Niger are Mohammedans. They are happy in their faith, which is simple. Your missionaries will never prevail over them. Christian dogma is too complicated."

Half an hour later I met the American missionary in the street. During my first stay in Bamako I had spent three days in his house. I knew him pretty well, a nervous, weary man, hospitable and lonely; so lonely, in fact, that while I stayed with him he poured out story after story of his life in Africa which had too long been shut up in him. These stories, told elsewhere than under the African night and by another than an isolated man relieving his heart and, for all I know, his soul to one who was at least a compatriot, might have seemed trivial. Here they were stark and full of tragic meaning. Swept on in a rush of remembered grief, disappointments, bitterest deceptions, and almost frenzied struggles to be reconciled, by emotions which now found expression and could not be silenced, he did not probe

into my own faith. For this I was grateful, for I should have been most reluctant to offend him.

Meeting him this day in the street, I thanked him for his hospitality in the past and for more recent kindness, and told him that I had at last decided to go down again to Timbuctoo. He recalled his only visit there, some six years before. As we were to do, he had gone down the Niger in a small boat.

"I walked into the market place," he said, "and read in a loud voice from the Bible. I read in our English tongue, and no one understood what I read; but for the first time the Gospel rang clear in the heart of that ancient, wicked city."

Suddenly, out of the mood of triumph which his memory had created, he turned directly to me.

"My friend," he asked, "do you know the Saviour?"

He had taken me off my guard.

"Not," I countered, "as you do."

There and then, in the full light of the sun, he took off his helmet, forgetful of the danger of stroke he had once so earnestly cautioned me against, oblivious of the stream of black people in the midst of which we stood, and he prayed for me. For a moment I watched his face, drawn thin by years of fanatic zeal. Then, quite as to shut out the apparition of an uneasy dream, I closed my eyes, and found beneath my lids, still undimmed, the luminous reality of Timbuctoo.

Chapter X: Epilogue

I

EVEN ON THAT BLOWY September noon when I left Dunkirk aboard a French tramp bound for Africa, Timbuctoo was not in itself my goal. No more than you would prepare yourself for New York if you were going there to take a steamer to Europe had I prepared myself for the city in the southern fringe of the Sahara I hoped to cross. Of the little that has been written about it I had read nothing. The world still regards it as mythical. This, through the business of passport visas and railway tickets, I had learned it is not. I had easily accepted the fact that it is an African town in the sands, with only a name that is unique; and being from day to day absorbed in the actualities of my voyage, I do not remember that I ever tried to imagine what it would be like. So I arrived in Timbuctoo without knowledge of it, without prejudice, with no preconceived ideas of it whatsoever.

I had grinned at many a stay-at-home in telling him I was going there, for I was quite conscious of the sin-

gular magic in the name. But when I reached Timbuctoo, I did not grin. After thousands of miles, I had come—nowhere; on the expanse of the desert, under the space of the sky, aflame with the sunset when I drew near the city, Timbuctoo was nothing, and I was nothing that went into it.

Then, day by day through a series of surprises so tranquil I was hardly aware of them, Timbuctoo became itself to me; and, curious as this may sound, I became myself to it. At first, it was as if I had been disintegrated and scattered. I had to pick myself up again bit by bit, and piece myself together in a shape that would conform to Timbuctoo and live comfortably in it. The conformity was not of my own planning, or in my own control. Timbuctoo simply smashed out any fragment that did not fit. In the end I voluntarily left a good many shards lying about the sand, among them a point of view. I no longer have a point of view of my own.

We cannot walk up and down in the world otherwise than as machines constructed to receive certain impressions of it. Some of us are tempered high, others low; but none of us can escape beyond the mechanics of eyes, ears, noses, and other sense organs. There is something pitiable in being doomed like that to anything. Doubtless we should not be happier if we could see like the hawk; and if we could smell as the wild beasts can, we might go crazy with strange things on the distant wind. Nevertheless, the fact of limitation

is pitiable. Yet, restricted thus as we are to start with, we persist in making ourselves smaller still, in immuring ourselves in habits so narrow as to make the limitations of our senses vast and generous by comparison.

Perhaps it is inevitable for man to incase himself in habit as the oyster incases itself in its shell. Climate, I suppose, is inexorable in fixing some of our physical customs; diet, for instance. On the other hand, the habit of thought, in which we bind ourselves as tightly and as cruelly as high-bred girls in China were said to bind their feet, may be only a convention. I do not know just how we can prevent it, for what grows free in childhood our schooling invariably lops and prunes, so that before we know it we are compressed into the habit of thought. Thereafter, shrinking from the fair limits of our senses, we jail ourselves in our minds. The outside world comes to mean hardly more to us than the theories, the sciences, and the arts we fabricate about it. We surrender to the logic we have created. The rest of life is lost to us, save the little a fixed point of view allows; and ultimately we depend upon that point of view as a submarine upon its periscope.

So habituated we are to being thus in prison that we fancy a point of view affords us freedom and a wide range. We do not doubt our minds have ventured a great deal farther than the limits of our senses. The telescope, for instance, has opened unimaginable distances to the eye.

Alas! beware the satisfaction of a point of view.

Mathematics and spectrum to the contrary notwithstanding, no man habituated to astronomy ever found through his telescope the half of what his free senses could tell him of the stars. Perhaps one must go to Timbuctoo—without a telescope—to feel so sure of this as I do. I may now read about the stars—how far away they are; how much gas they burn in a year; what they are made of; how they move. My mind quickens; my imagination goes afield. Then I recall the stars over my rooftop in Timbuctoo, over the dormant, shadowy city, over the desert all about, and the book seems narrow and unreal. There, the stars *are*. Words are only symbols; put the stars in words and you merely say what they are like. There's the point of view for you! But in Timbuctoo, what the stars are you feel with every sense; their silence fills your ears; their light falls on your skin; for all I know, the smell and taste of them are in your nostrils and your mouth. And it is all ineffable because the mind simply cannot grasp it and say that it is *like* anything; because, with every sense played upon, you cease at last to be a point of view. You, also, *are*.

When I returned from Africa, the question, "What is Timbuctoo like?" dumfounded me. I cannot yet answer it, for I am still without a point of view, which alone would enable me to judge it. Timbuctoo *is* light; it is silence; it is the faint smell of the desert dust; it is heat and the moisture of your sweat; it is cold, and your shivering in the moonlight; it is cold sand under

your feet in the dawn. And the people are movement; they are laughter; they are the clatter and the murmur of strange speech; they are scorn, affection, fear, trust. Of this reality of Timbuctoo I found myself unable to speak; for reality is not comparable, it is incomplete; and, being life, is defined only when it ceases to be.

What Timbuctoo was more—or less—than such actuality, was my mind's notion of it. Philosophy assumes to regulate the disparity between what things are and what we think they are. But philosophy is only a point of view. So is science. For me to describe Timbuctoo from either, or from that of politics or commerce, or from any other which my training might fit me to take, would be fundamentally to misrepresent the incomparable reality of the whole experience. Yet we have so restricted ourselves in a habit of thought that we now almost naturally reject any information not so misrepresented as to fit in our point of view. Who knows but we are losing the ability to take anything into our consciousness save through the deforming prejudice of our intellect?

With Africa lately lost to me below the southern horizon, I went to spend a month in a Cornish village. The fishermen had been friends of mine; they knew I had gone on a long voyage, and I rather thought how splendid it would be to tell them of my adventures. We gathered in the pub, and I told them I had been to Timbuctoo.

"Timbuctoo? Where's that?" they asked without interest.

"It's in Africa."

"In Africa! Have you been in Africa?" They were excited.

"Yes."

"Did you see any lions?"

I said I had seen their tracks and had heard them, but they drove me into confessing that I had not laid eyes on one, at least, on any wild one. Immediately they lost interest. In vain I tried to tell them how terrifying was a tame lion—loose. For those men, I had not been in Africa at all.

On the day I returned to New York a black porter carried my bag to the train for me. He was the first negro I had had a chance to speak to since I had left Africa so far behind. I gave him a very big tip.

"I have been in Africa," I said, "the land your people came from. They were kind to me there; I shall always be grateful."

He looked at me a moment.

"Did you see any lions?" he asked.

"No. I saw their tracks and I heard them. But I want to tell you—"

"But you never saw any lions."

And he walked away so disappointed that he forgot to thank me for my tip.

A pleasant and by no means illiterate lady led me into a tale of my two month's journey down the Niger,

in the course of which we went many days without ever seeing a white man and were constantly with the blacks. I happened to mention the grace of the Jurma people in their long robes.

"What!" she cried, in some resentment. "Did they wear clothes?"

I could not deny that they did, that all the black races in the Senegal and the Sudan did. Leaving me to feel that somehow I had cheated her, she turned to talking herself of a missionary who lived among blacks who were naked, or practically so—"a missionary who *really* was in Africa, you know."

I suspect it is only because I have come back visibly whole that some with whom I have talked must believe I was telling the truth in saying the black men ate rice and fish, not me; though, even so, I think they do not wholly credit me with having been in Africa.

II

Underneath certain strong prejudices lies a foundation of taste, and in so far as taste is a result of physical temperament, it may not be overruled. To my eyes the black people of Africa were often strikingly handsome; but when I showed a photograph of one to a good lady, she shuddered in horror; and many men have found in the same photograph the likeness of an ape. If in an unguarded moment I now refer to the Timbuctoo natives as fine-looking, some one says: "Come, now;

don't be absurd. You cannot honestly believe that those thick lips and those flat noses are beautiful." Such a matter of taste is very real, and therefore unreasonable; and those who laugh at me have as much right to call me willful as I have to call them limited.

But taste is often a result of habit as well as of physical temperament. Take the American who goes into a famous French restaurant and orders ham and eggs. The French eat ham and eggs, too, and cook them deliciously. They cook other things into dishes worth a journey to France. Suppose I prefer one of these. Sons of the same soil, we eat to our delight, which is real, and quite unreasonable; so that if he calls my taste jaded I can call his crude, and that's all. But what if he says: "You're a fine American, you are, eating that fancy stuff!" That's habit; it's unreal and it's desperately arguable.

I remember nearly a month along the West Coast on an English freighter. We had a great deal of meat and potatoes to eat, with various puddings; but never any green stuff. I suppose there is no doubt that green vegetables and fruit are wholesome in the tropics; they certainly taste good. One day I hinted to the captain, to whom I was deeply attached both by sympathy and by admiration, that I thought it would be a good thing for the company to furnish its fleet with refrigerators, so that from time to time they could stock up with fruits and salad at those ports where they were on sale.

He looked at me a moment as if all friendship were ended between us.

"Do you know what made the British marine what it is?" he asked me sternly. "Salt pork and rum, sir; and, by God! if they were good enough for those grand old sailors, they're good enough for us. Salt pork and rum, sir; that's the British marine."

So I never told him how the Breton, Emile, a very person of the sea, used once or twice a week to lead me swiftly and slyly aft along the deck of the *Vendôme* to the box where he hid a treasure; or how he lifted the tarpaulin and showed me the big snails within; or how his eyes sparkled as he poured over them a mess of flour, sugar, and water, that they might fatten as, wonderfully, snails will. For even giving ear to such a tale—might not my good captain judge even that treasonable?

This was the sort of prejudice Timbuctoo smashed out of my reconstruction. It so happens that most of the white people who have been in Timbuctoo have been Europeans; and if the natives do not refer to a white man simply as a "white," which removes him definitely from them, they do so as a "European," which sets him at precisely the same distance. For a while, hearing them call me a "European," I fancied they were suffering under a misapprehension so serious that I had better correct it. Once or twice I remember saying: "No. I am not a European; I am an American." But Timbuctoo showed me the folly of insisting on such a distinction; which, moreover, in failing utterly to create a real

difference in the eyes of the Songhai, made me question how much real difference there was, anyhow. To spread-eagle there in the sands of the desert merely because they refused to learn a new and difficult adjective was too comical a parade. So I submitted, and with no sense of defeat whatsoever, to being called a European; and only on returning to Europe and to America did I painfully relearn that though blood spill, I must eat pie for breakfast and not salt pork and rum.

From the point of view of the black Africans—and those amiable persons have their periscopes, too—we whites are pretty much alike. They recognize chiefly in us characteristics common to us all. I do not know that they give names to them separately. We do; and besides, we lump them together and give them a curious name—civilization. We agree that we are all civilized.

No term is more amusing than this in the mouth of any native African who has learned it from us. I remember two occasions on which I heard it so. Once was in a town on the northern coast of Africa. I had fallen to talking with an Arab caretaker, who was used to Europeans—and Americans—and who knew which side his bread was buttered on. He was recalling a revolt of unruly Kabyles in Southern Algeria.

"We were sent down to quell it," he said, "and took along a couple of machine guns. Those Kabyles did not know what they were and kept coming right on. Of course, we shot 'em all down. They aren't civilized, you know."

The other time was even more amusing. It was along the Niger somewhere. I was traveling in a small boat with another white man, and we came for the night's camp to a lonely native village. We needed wood for our cook fires, and, as wood was scarce there, our interpreter asked the village to find us some. It so happened that the chief was absent, and his young son was temporarily headman.

After a long wait, our Mahmadou came stamping down to the boat with an armful of wood. We could see that he was fuming.

"He's an idiot," he declared, in soft but resentful French.

"Who?"

"The son of the chief. I told him you white men wanted wood, and he ordered his bucks to fetch wood. But they brought pieces too big for you to use. So he ordered them to split the wood. They refused, and he split it himself."

"Thank him for his courtesy," we said.

"Courtesy!" Mahmadou groaned. "Damn fool he is to split the wood himself with the bucks standing round. *Ah, qu'il est bête. Mais que voulez-vous? Ils ne sont pas civilisés, ces noirs par ici.*"

While I was in Timbuctoo, I saw that it was natural for the black man to identify civilization with machine guns and the display of authority. To a certain extent it was inevitable, given his point of view. Moreover, it was not all merely in a point of view. Machine guns

are real enough when they riddle you with bullets; and so is authority when it roars to split your ears. But I thought it a pity the black man's understanding of civilization was so superficial; that he could not see beneath our surface some of those qualities in which we take pride. I wondered a little if I could deepen his perception, so that he might regard us at least with less fear and possibly with less contempt.

As I pondered thus, however, in the stillness of my house, as the stranger among my own guests, I came to realize, not precisely how gratuitous—though I felt that, too—but how superfluous any effort I might make in that direction would be. Hardly a white man in Africa, or a white woman, but is striving in one way or another to force into the black man's head a proper notion of how grand a thing our civilization is.

III

Grand it may be; it certainly is intricate. But it is far from perfect; and its grandeur and its complexities are perhaps only the magnification of a basic imperfection, like a fraction raised to dizzy terms. In the magnitude of our proportions we take a great deal of pride; surely not in humility would we tell the black man that we are too involved for his understanding. If we were talking figures, we would tell him, for instance, that we are three-hundred-fifty-five five-hundred-sixty-eighths, that he might gasp; never that we are merely

five-eighths, which, possibly, we have even forgotten we are. Now, whether the black people know arithmetic or not, they have an intuition that simplifies life, and us as well; and I am sure we could never pass among them as anything grander than five-eighths.

What must seem curious to them is the awful importance we attach to our swellings. I know we do that. Nothing in Timbuctoo was more irritating to me than the smart of being continually reduced from my elevations. I confess frankly that I often had fine, even noble, feelings; as if they had been balloons, the Songhai pricked them, and they suffered the collapse of pricked balloons. I confess even to some exalted thought. The Songhai walked under it, laughing. With many another white man I called their shafts of intuitive wit and their indifference insolence; like many a white man, I roared in a fury at it. But in the end I did come to see that when I found them execrable, it was chiefly because they would not find me admirable.

Though this discovery may have been in part a notion, it was also quite really an unsavory dose. I never met another white man in Africa who had to drink it to the dregs as I had; for I never met another so without the dignity—vicarious as it might be—of a purpose in which to protect his own self. Yet, personal as my experience was, it made me aware of my racial habits; and I am certain that what civilization most deprecates in those it calls uncivilized is their obstinate refusal to admire what it calls civilization.

I talked with a dozen black men who had gone to Europe as soldiers in the war. Most of them had been wounded, and badly wounded; which meant that they had passed many months in hospitals where they had been kindly treated and restored. Now they were back in Africa, living on pensions. These men had had a vivid experience of civilization in its own domain. I do not mean in their contact with modern fighting. There is ground for believing that civilization means more than that; though if we are going to reproach certain Africans with using poisoned arrows and with cruelty in general, it is not fair to leave out of our own reckoning the energy we have put into the mechanics of warfare. I mean rather their experience in hospital, under the care of skilled surgeons and kind nurses; their view of a lovely European land, the south of France in which they all got well; their acquaintance with big cities, with railroads and steamers, telephones and lights at night.

I tried to lead them to tell me of their impressions. I looked to see their faces lighten with some remembered astonishment, some admiration of our marvels, with gratitude—for the white men habitually expect the blacks to be grateful—to some doctor whose science had made them whole, to some nurse who had eased their suffering. I looked in vain. They had not been impressed; they had not admired. They were glad to be at home.

These were the men who came to see me in Timbuctoo; the black men on whose care I relied during the

long voyage down the Niger. And when I returned to my own home and told people about them and how little Europe had impressed them, almost everyone said:

"But you cannot expect them to appreciate what they saw. After all, they're uncivilized."

Then I'd go on and complete the story; for in almost every case there was a conclusion. The black men had marveled and had been grateful in their own way. Allah had preserved them. Each, when he was sure of not being ridiculed, would take from the leather wallet hung about his neck a parchment folded small, frayed and dirty along the folds, too; and would discover to me the Arabic texts written thereon by the holy man who had blessed him before he went north into the lands of the Christians. Beside the miracle of those texts all the white man's civilization faded to insignificance.

Upon hearing this tale, the civilized gave tongue to their impulse.

"We must free these blacks from superstition."

Into the black man's land we send teachers to found schools for him; for education is presumed to be the foe of superstition. Without doubting we are conferring benefits upon him, we teach him to read and write our languages. The more he can read, the more can we feed him books of our grandeur and our benevolence, so that he may grow in knowledge of what splendid beings we are and even may perceive how inestimably he can improve his own state by identifying his interests with ours.

Though the ability to read and write seems unques-

tionably an advantage, the value of it, like that of a thousand other accomplishments we might teach the Africans, is not absolute, but in the midst of races with ways of living and thinking wholly different from ours, may shrink to wholly different proportions. Actually, reading and writing have no value to the black man in Africa except in relation to the white man's business. That he would do well to learn them is a fact which can hardly be denied in view of the power of the white man's commerce in his land; but that by so doing he betters himself in any other relation is a peculiar assumption.

It is almost a natural one for us to make. While in our own society we recognize just such a practical value in the knowledge of reading and writing as the black man in Africa may profit by, we have fallen deeply into the habit of attributing further virtues to it, which become more and more mystical as we ascend by that knowledge into realms of art and science and philosophy. For us these altitudes are alight with an almost divine splendor; up there we pretend to find a refuge from dangers and sorrows of the world, a serenity without shadow. But is this other than the comfort the black man finds in his holy script and in his faith that Allah saved him out of the horrors of the European war? In Timbuctoo it seemed no different to me. It seemed to me that in teaching the black man to believe that through education he will find solace and wisdom he never dreamed of, we are merely trying to plant one of our own superstitions in his mind.

One night in Africa I fell in with a group of missionaries as they were about to open a religious meeting. They started the service with music—with an utterly mournful hymn tune, which they sang tenderly off the key, accompanying themselves—approximately—on a melodeon and a cornet. After the service we went up to their rooftop and looked down upon the starlit square, across which there now came dancing a native wedding procession. They sang as they danced, and musicians beat on tom-toms and blew reed pipes. The missionaries were honest enough not to disguise their scorn.

"And they call that music," one of them laughed.

This was cold judgment, without appeal. Futile for me to say, "I call that music, too"; but I wondered what the black men felt about the missionaries' plaint. I think they would have been more curious than scornful, the black people; partly because they were better musicians, and partly because they are a bit more generous than we, if being open-hearted is being generous.

I am sure we seem barbarous to them, crude and selfish in many ways. We are so tight and hard within the habits of our own thought and judgment. I think I know a little how they feel. When I returned to Europe I did not find it easy to fit into our restrictions. Everything seemed cramped. I do not mean physical things alone, the high walls of our cities and so forth, or even the relative stiffness of our social decorum, which is actually hardly stiffer than theirs; but rather the for-

malities of our logic and our art. The theater, for instance, seemed such a coop, and the play so puffed up with little things; our music was such a deafening fury shut in the concert hall and roaring round and round within its own conventions. Only people walled in from their senses could make so much of their own ideas.

I remember going down to Chartres cathedral, with the hope that there I could surely recapture the beauties of our civilization. It was a brilliant day, and I thought as I went up the steps how wonderful the glass would show. Pushing through the door, I entered the somber church, only to feel, in a despair which was momentary but real, how walls, arches, vaultings, and glass shut out the sun. Is it to warm such gloom with rapture that we would educate the black man?

IV

That rapture is in us, we have taken careful stock of it and appraised it highly. The black man can put no value on it. If he takes note of it in us, it must be as another manifestation of our self-importance.

We are full of aspiration, too, exalting ourselves, we trust, out of brutishness towards beauty, knowledge, God, what you will. The black man could hardly conceive of such explicit aspiration; and did he do so might tremble before it as before a blasphemous pretension.

So it is with many of our virtues, virtues that are

unblemished save by the stain of the pride we take in them. The black man does not credit us with them. We have guns and money enough, for instance, to make all the blacks in Africa slaves if we wish to; yet in the Niger Valley and elsewhere we have delivered them from the menace of slavery, and we pay them wages to work for us. But the black man does not see that gesture as we see it. Or do we acknowledge, ourselves, that in paying him wages we would oblige him to acquiesce in the importance of our enterprise; that we expect him not only to render the labor for which we pay him money, but also to give a devotion which costs us nothing but him his very identity. To you as a man he will devote himself, even to the risk of his life; but to your schemes and your ideals he will not devote himself, for something in his nature tells him that they do not deserve his devotion.

Ultimately I came to feel that we could impose nothing of our civilization upon the black man without exacting from him the sacrifice of something worth more to him than anything we could give in reward. Conveniences and luxuries of life, prizes of our conquest of nature, trains and steamboats, telephones and lights, such advantages, without which we can no longer live, distort so violently the pattern of his existence that he can only suffer a slow death thereby. A question Balzac put into the mouth of one of his characters often haunts me when I think of Timbuctoo: *Mourir par les stimu-*

lants ou par les narcotiques, qu'importe? N'est-ce pas toujours la mort, monsieur le docteur?

Surely—I have thought—in preventing him famine, in healing his sickness, in relieving his pain and sometimes his fear, we have done well by the black man. Yet we have ourselves almost lost what is so strikingly his—the patience to suffer without complaint; in which heritage from the animals may be rooted the noblest virtue that can ever grow out of any of us.

There is nothing peculiar in our confidence in the validity of our own civilization; and, since I like to believe that I have left my habit of judgment like a handful of sand to blow in the winds of the Sahara, nothing reprehensible. No people can question its own way of living, which is a projection, after all, of itself. Till we know ourselves, we cannot critically estimate our shadow. But I think we have come to a point now at which we might accuse ourselves of stubbornness in essaying to teach the Africans—and for that matter all other peoples who are not of our branch of humankind—how admirable we are. Not because we may or may not be admirable; but because so long as we keep driving at that teaching, so long are we bound to condemn the black man if he refuses to learn. If we abandoned so obstinate a campaign, which forces us to regard Africa from the one angle of our point of view, we might see that the black man is himself admirable. Then at least he could no longer accuse in us—as he now can—the indifference

we deplore in him. Then, at least, we could more justly claim a virtue in our civilization.

V

Some such vision came to me in Timbuctoo, real and immediate as the stars over my rooftop at night; and no matter what the black men there think of me, I remember it and cling to it as to one of the astonishingly real experiences of my whole life.

I have indeed been dumfounded by the questions put me about Timbuctoo and the people in it, which would reduce my experience to judgment and tie it up in a point of view. "What did you do there? I should think you'd have died of the monotony!" "Do you mean to say those black people came right into your room? How could you stand it? Weren't they filthy? Didn't they smell?" "How can an educated white man like you endure life among such uncivilized people?"

Well, life in Timbuctoo was not monotonous, because it was slow and it all counted. The people were not filthy and they did not smell. They had no worse habits than I had, and certainly they had better manners. And finally, it never occurred to me that they were uncivilized. They were not coarse, rude, brutish; on the contrary, they were sensitive and proud. To be sure, they were a city people; but I am quite as certain of the refinement of the black people in the desert wilderness

all along the Niger for the fifteen hundred miles of its course which I followed. They were gentle and friendly; I felt a nobility in them.

Oh, I had my pains to bear. They did not appreciate me; far from it. My education, my talents, my reading, my conscious humanity such as they all are, these accomplishments the black people ignored. The talks I could have given them—on the practical value of honesty to them who never stole from me; on the moral joy of restraint to them who were reserved; on the satisfaction of work—from me who was idling; on the propriety of respect—from me who tried not to patronize! Great Heavens! could I not be done with it and give them fifty centimes to prove I really wished them well and was not a mere talker! I lost my temper countless times at the inexorable decency with which they made it plain to me that they liked me only because I gave them things, and for no other reason. The implication was intolerable —that there was no other reason why they should like me.

Their reality triumphed in the end. Whether or not they liked me, I liked them. Now when I hear them called backward, dishonest, lazy, and ungrateful, I feel it is only a point of view that charges them so, just as only a point of view could pretend to disparage them by calling them uncivilized. As the point of view is unreal, so are the words empty. But give them the weight of the very defects, and I am still not so certain

that those defects retard the advance of our civilization through Africa as I am that what is truest and best in the black people resists it. But what is truest and best in all of us we can only sometimes feel and cannot ever judge.

THE END

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